

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY



0 0001 6316 903

PYLES/ALGEO

# English

AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE

Ex LIBRIS  
UNIVERSITATIS  
ALBERTAENSIS







Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from  
University of Alberta Libraries



# English

AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE



# English

AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE

THOMAS PYLES

*Northwestern University*

JOHN ALGEO

*University of Florida*

02447



**HARCOURT, BRACE & WORLD, INC.**

New York / Chicago / San Francisco / Atlanta

© 1970 BY HARCOURT, BRACE & WORLD, INC.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN: 0-15-522642-8

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 73-120314

Printed in the United States of America

Note on cover: The entry for the word "English" is reprinted by permission from Funk and Wagnalls Standard® College Dictionary, © 1968 by Funk & Wagnalls, A Division of Reader's Digest Books, Inc.



# PREFACE

This book is intended to be a concise and practical introduction to the many facets of the English language. In the current period of controversial linguistic scholarship it sets forth what its writers believe to be matters of permanent value without committal to any particularism, though with full recognition of, and sincere admiration for, what is new and good.

Eclectic in both choice of materials and in its methods of presenting those materials, the book concentrates on what seems most significant for the beginning student of language—specifically, his own language. It attempts to bridge the credibility gap between what has often been traditionally taught and what the student can himself observe about language in daily use, by providing a modern and realistic understanding of how the language functions as well as, briefly, how it developed. Such a comprehension of basic linguistic phenomena is conducive to a clearer understanding of practically all else worthy of study—whether it be for more specialized work in whatever turnings linguistic study is likely to take in the future; for prospective teachers of English or language; or simply as a background for writing, reading, and evaluating in other fields of knowledge. Exercises in practical application are interspersed liberally throughout the text to enable the student to test his own understanding.

The entire text was read in its original draft by William H. Cullen of the State University of New York, College at Potsdam, Faye L. Kelly of the American University, and Charles B. Martin and Carroll Y. Rich, both of North Texas State University. Various chapters were also read and critically appraised by Philip Bradshaw, Richard A. Dwyer, Patrick M. Geoghegan, Jayne Crane Harder, Melvyn New, and Joel H. Siegel, all of the University of Florida. From all these preliminary readers have come valuable suggestions for improvement, which have been gratefully adopted. Such sins of omission and commission as remain are no fault of theirs and must be ruefully acknowledged as our own. Finally, we owe a special debt of gratitude to Adele Algeo for her work on the index and for putting a large part of the text into typescript.

T. P.  
J. A.

# CONTENTS

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Preface | v |
|---------|---|

## **1 CLEARING THE AIR 1**

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| The Discipline of Linguistics    | 2  |
| Pronunciation and Spelling       | 3  |
| Some Common Linguistic Fallacies | 6  |
| Linguistic Purity                | 12 |
| Climate and Speech               | 15 |
| The Dangers of Speculation       | 16 |

## **2 THE MATTER OF USAGE 21**

|                            |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| “Good” and “Bad” Usage     | 21 |
| Old Words and New          | 26 |
| Prescriptivism and Usage   | 29 |
| U and Non-U Usage          | 39 |
| Levels and Styles of Usage | 47 |

|          |                                       |            |
|----------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>3</b> | <b>SPEECH AND WRITING</b>             | <b>52</b>  |
|          | Distinctive Sounds                    | 54         |
|          | The Vowels of English                 | 56         |
|          | The Consonants of English             | 58         |
|          | Phonotactics                          | 61         |
|          | Prosodic Features                     | 64         |
|          | The Development of Our Writing System | 70         |
|          | The English Spelling System           | 72         |
|          | The Spelling of Vowel Phonemes        | 73         |
|          | The Spelling of Consonant Phonemes    | 84         |
| <b>4</b> | <b>VOCABULARY</b>                     | <b>96</b>  |
|          | Signs                                 | 96         |
|          | Morphemes                             | 98         |
|          | Idioms                                | 101        |
|          | Allomorphs                            | 103        |
|          | Origins of the Vocabulary             | 106        |
|          | Changes of Form                       | 115        |
|          | Obsolescence                          | 121        |
|          | Words and Dictionaries                | 123        |
| <b>5</b> | <b>GRAMMAR</b>                        | <b>133</b> |
|          | Hierarchies and Trees                 | 133        |
|          | Deep and Surface Structure            | 138        |
|          | Embedding                             | 143        |
|          | Structural Signals                    | 153        |
|          | Some Word Classes                     | 165        |
|          | Some Grammatical Structures           | 169        |
|          | A Theory of Language                  | 175        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>MEANING</b>                        | <b>183</b> |
|          | What Is Meaning?                      | 184        |
|          | Words and Things                      | 188        |
|          | Talking and Thinking                  | 192        |



|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Dimensions of Meaning | 196 |
| How to Define a Word  | 208 |
| Synonyms and Homonyms | 215 |
| Antonyms              | 222 |
| Changes of Meaning    | 225 |

## **7 THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE 233**

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| The Basic Functions of Language | 233 |
| Literary Discourse              | 238 |
| Sound Patterns                  | 241 |
| Rhythm                          | 246 |
| Diction and Metaphor            | 249 |
| Grammar and Beyond              | 254 |

## **8 LOGIC 262**

|                                                |     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| The Logical Use of Language                    | 263 |
| Two Kinds of Argument: Deduction and Induction | 268 |
| How to Go Wrong                                | 275 |
| Too Little Evidence                            | 278 |
| Evidence of the Wrong Sort                     | 284 |
| Muddled Words                                  | 292 |
| Wrong Inference                                | 295 |

## **9 THE LIGHT OF HISTORY 303**

|                                                |     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Reconstructed Forms                            | 303 |
| The Indo-European "Family"                     | 304 |
| The Germanic Subgroup                          | 305 |
| Old English: Chronology and Dialects           | 309 |
| Loan-Words in Old English                      | 311 |
| The Sounds and Spelling of Old English         | 316 |
| How Old English Throws Light on Modern English | 319 |
| The Old English Inflectional System            | 319 |
| A Word About Cases                             | 320 |
| The Source of the Modern English Genitive      | 321 |

|                                                         |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| The Source of Modern English Plural Forms               | 322 |
| The Demonstrative Pronouns and Articles                 | 324 |
| Adjective and Adverb Forms                              | 325 |
| The Personal and Relative Pronouns                      | 326 |
| Verb Forms                                              | 329 |
| A Quick Survey of Important Middle English Developments | 333 |
| The Great Vowel Shift                                   | 336 |
| American English                                        | 338 |
| <br>                                                    |     |
| Index                                                   | 345 |

# English

AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE



# 1

## CLEARING THE AIR

Attitudes toward language are likely to be highly charged emotionally, almost as much so for those who hold them as are attitudes toward God and country. It is perhaps not strange that this should be so, since even the humblest of men, simply by virtue of being human, have language always with them.

Even though we may never give much thought to language as such, regarding it merely as a means to an end—which is primarily what it is—we are likely to be put off by forms of speech different from our own and may sometimes show a considerable degree of intolerance toward such forms. Many Americans dislike British speech, and vice versa; many may even resent, to the extent of being prejudiced against, the speech of regions of their own land other than those in which they acquired their own speech habits.

These resentments and prejudices are often evinced in national political campaigns when candidates for office have markedly regional types of speech. The eastern New England speech of the Kennedy brothers, with its intrusive *r*'s (as in "Cuba[r] and the United States"), at first caused considerable amusement in parts of the United States unaccustomed to it, though it is doubtful that anyone ever actually resented it. The prejudice in many parts of the country against the inland southern speech of Lyndon Baines Johnson was, however, so great that in some quarters it doubtless affected attitudes toward the man himself. It is certain that, had his speech been of the coastal southern ("plantation") type, these attitudes would have been considerably modified, although it is difficult to say why this should be true in a so-called democracy. Even Franklin Delano Roosevelt's expensive Groton-cum-

Harvard accent, so greatly admired by his followers, was caricatured by entertainers and derided by those who disapproved of the late president and his policies. Few were really indifferent to it.

## **THE DISCIPLINE OF LINGUISTICS**

Though not totally immune to such attitudes, most professional students of language—that is, **linguists**—as a rule avoid them, much as doctors avoid any emotional approach toward the symptoms that they diagnose. But, as every doctor must be aware, many persons who are otherwise intelligent and even highly educated have altogether fantastic notions about physiology and pathology, notions that they express vehemently, sometimes even to experts. After all, everyone has a body of one sort or another. And everyone has language of one sort or another.

Thus it is not too surprising that so many people should fancy themselves authorities on the language that they themselves speak and write constantly and sometimes quite effectively, and often on other languages as well, if they have had even a smattering of schoolroom instruction in them. Linguists are likely to find themselves soundly resented by otherwise well-informed laymen, who set forth in the most authoritative manner their opinions about language, or more often about what they fancy language is or, still more often, ought to be. The linguist's claim to a special understanding of the phenomena of language is, it should be said, not nearly so widely respected as that of the doctor in his special field. For one thing, the doctor has had a high, not to say glamorous, status for a long time, and he is concerned with considerably more crucial phenomena—matters of life and death, in fact—than any possible linguistic ones.

As we shall see, the study of language—that is, **linguistics**—is a discipline at least as rigorous as the study of any other branch of learning—medicine, philosophy, literature, architecture, and so on. Moreover, it is a discipline whose mastery—assuming that it is ever really mastered—does not necessarily confer upon the linguist a command of literary style; otherwise linguists would write and speak more stylishly than many of them do. But a discipline it is, and it cannot be acquired by intuition, any more than we originally acquired our native language by intuition; we have merely forgotten the hard work, joyously undertaken in childhood, that went into the process of acquiring it.

### **Exercises**

1. How do people react to forms of English other than their own? What explanation can you offer for such reactions?

2. How reliable a guide to a man's character is his speech? Explain your answer.
3. The word *linguist* has two meanings. One is illustrated in the fourth paragraph of this chapter; the other is synonymous with *polyglot*. What are these two meanings? Can a person be a linguist in either sense without being one in the other sense of the term?

## PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING

The confusion of speech with **writing**, the graphic symbolization of speech, has given rise to many mistaken notions, among them the notion that if English spelling were to be reformed to eliminate all ambiguities of a given symbol and all "silent letters"—not a bad idea if it were possible—the language itself would somehow be vastly improved, and furthermore, foreigners would have comparatively little difficulty in learning it. Such confusion has led to the naive concoction of new English alphabets and at least one "global alphabet."

Another manifestation of this confusion is the notion of many literate people who fancy that English words should be pronounced as they are written, thus giving rise to what are called **spelling pronunciations**. This notion is by no means new; it is in fact perfectly natural that a rather large percentage of younger speakers should have restored the long-lost sound symbolized by the *t* in *often* (though it has not as yet been restored in *soften*) because that is the way they have learned to say the word; but the pronunciation with *t* nevertheless began as a spelling pronunciation and is not really very old.<sup>1</sup> It is similar to the reanalysis of the previously amalgamated compound *forehead*, with secondary stress on *-head*—a pronunciation not even

<sup>1</sup>G. H. McKnight, *Modern English in the Making* (New York, 1928), p. 568, cites the following dialogue from what was in 1928 a recent English novel:

"What sort of people are the Herberts? Is Mrs. Herbert a lady?"

"She is the sort of person who pronounces the 't' in 'often.'"

Poor Mrs. Herbert is thus obliquely condemned as "no lady." Her then crude spelling pronunciation has since, however, become widespread in socially and intellectually exalted circles for more than a generation.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (the relevant section was published in 1902) notes that the pronunciation with *t*, though "not recognized in the dictionaries, is now frequent in the south of England, and is often used in singing." It recognizes, that is, records, only the traditional pronunciation without *t*. This great scholarly monument, hereafter referred to as the *OED*, attempts to give the complete history, so far as it is known, of every word entered. The first section was published in 1884; the last, in 1928. A supplementary volume appeared in 1933. The work was previously titled *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, but since 1933, when it was reissued with a new title page reading *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the older abbreviation *NED* has given way to *OED*.

noted by the *OED* (the section listing the word appeared in 1897), but now usual among younger-generation speakers, even though it spoils the children's rime about the little girl with the little curl right in the middle of her forehead who, though at times she behaved very well indeed, was horrid when she misbehaved.<sup>2</sup> The standard American pronunciation of *Norwich* as the name of the Connecticut town likewise ruins the old nursery rime about the man from Norwich who ate some porridge. Before Yankee know-how, fortified by book learning, got to work on the place name, *Norwich* and *porridge* were exact rimes.

Examples of spelling pronunciations are not hard to find; for instance, *breeches* traditionally rimes with *riches* and *clapboard* with *scabbard*. The initial *h* sound in *humor*, *host*, and *hostel*—words that come into English from Old French—is due entirely to the spelling with *h*; *humor* wavers between pronunciation with and without the initial breathing, which, incidentally, never occurs in *honor*, *honest*, *heir(ess)*, and *hour*. The *h*, of course, has never had any phonetic significance in either Old or Modern French; its occurrence in the spellings represents a remodeling of early Old French spelling on the basis of the Latin originals. Many pronunciations based upon written forms have long been universal, for instance that of *author* with the middle consonant as in *ether*; the word appears in late Middle English (from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century), taken from Old French without the written *h*, which was latter inserted in a misguided effort to make the word look more “learned.” Ultimately the pseudo-learned spelling effected the change in pronunciation, with the written *th* being interpreted as a spelling for the sound that it usually represents in English. The same thing is now happening to *thyme*.

The confusion of writing with speech is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the layman's concept of languages as being “phonetic” or “unphonetic.” The terms are frequently so used; thus, one may be informed that Spanish is a “phonetic language,”<sup>3</sup> whereas English is not. What is meant by such absurd statements seems to be simply that the spelling conventions of Spanish symbolize the pronunciation of Spanish more satisfactorily than do our own spelling conventions that of English, about which we shall have much more

<sup>2</sup>The jingle ran something like this:

There was a little girl  
Who had a little curl  
Right in the middle of her forehead;  
And when she was good  
She was very, very good;  
But when she was bad she was horrid.

It may no longer be very widely current in juvenile circles.

<sup>3</sup>It is, according to Miriam Chapin, “easy, phonetic, musical” (*How People Talk* [New York, 1947], p. 136).



to say later. But to speak of one language as being more or less phonetic than another is to speak linguistic nonsense, since all language is by its very nature phonetic—that is, made up of combinations of sounds, or **phones**—regardless of how these sounds may be symbolized in writing. There are, in fact, many languages that have never been written at all.

## Exercises

4. Below are four types of reformed spelling. How do they differ from one another? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in them?

1. מֵ סִקֵּר נִמְוֵר רִשָּׁרֵס רִפְלִסֵּשׁ  
 וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס  
 וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס  
 וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס  
 וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס וְרִשָּׁרֵסֵס

The Shaw Alphabet, winner of a prize established by G. B. Shaw's will for the best design of a new alphabet.\*

### \*The Shaw Alphabet Reading Key

The letters are classified as Tall, Deep, Short, and Compound. Beneath each letter is its full name: its *sound* is shown in **bold** type.

|           |                  |                  |                  |                 |                   |                 |                     |                    |                 |                   |
|-----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Tall:     | ⌋<br><i>peep</i> | 1<br><i>tot</i>  | ⌋<br><i>kick</i> | ⌋<br><i>fee</i> | ⌋<br><i>thigh</i> | ⌋<br><i>so</i>  | ⌋<br><i>sure</i>    | ⌋<br><i>church</i> | ⌋<br><i>yea</i> | ⌋<br><i>hung</i>  |
| Deep:     | ⌋<br><i>bib</i>  | ⌋<br><i>dead</i> | ⌋<br><i>gag</i>  | ⌋<br><i>vow</i> | ⌋<br><i>they</i>  | ⌋<br><i>zoo</i> | ⌋<br><i>measure</i> | ⌋<br><i>judge</i>  | ⌋<br><i>woe</i> | ⌋<br><i>ha-ha</i> |
| Short:    | ⌋<br><i>loll</i> | ⌋<br><i>mime</i> | ⌋<br><i>if</i>   | ⌋<br><i>egg</i> | ⌋<br><i>ash</i>   | ⌋<br><i>ado</i> | ⌋<br><i>on</i>      | ⌋<br><i>wool</i>   | ⌋<br><i>out</i> | ⌋<br><i>ah</i>    |
|           | ⌋<br><i>roar</i> | ⌋<br><i>nun</i>  | ⌋<br><i>eat</i>  | ⌋<br><i>age</i> | ⌋<br><i>ice</i>   | ⌋<br><i>up</i>  | ⌋<br><i>oak</i>     | ⌋<br><i>ooze</i>   | ⌋<br><i>oil</i> | ⌋<br><i>awe</i>   |
| Compound: | ⌋<br><i>are</i>  | ⌋<br><i>or</i>   | ⌋<br><i>air</i>  | ⌋<br><i>err</i> | ⌋<br><i>array</i> | ⌋<br><i>ear</i> | ⌋<br><i>lan</i>     | ⌋<br><i>yew</i>    |                 |                   |

The four most frequent words are represented by single letters: *the* ⌋, *of* ⌋, and *to* 1. Proper names may be distinguished by a preceding 'Namer' dot: e.g. •⌋⌋, *Rome*. Punctuation and numerals are unchanged.

2. forscor and seven yeers agoe our fathers braut forth on this continent a nue næþhion, conseēvd in liberty, and dedicæted tō the proposiþhion that aull men ar creēated eekwal.

Sir James Pitman's *Augmented Roman or Initial Teaching Alphabet*.

3. Forskor and sevn yeez agoe our faadherz braut forth on this kontinent a nue naeshon, konseēvd in liberti, and dedikaeted to the propozishon that aul men ar kreaeted eequel.

R. E. Zachrisson, *Anglic* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1932), p. 76.

4. Foarscore and seven years ago our faadhers braught forth on this continent a new nation, conceēvd in liberty, and dedicated to the propozition that aul men ar created equol.

Axel Wijk, *Regularized English* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959), p. 333.

5. The following words have both traditional and spelling pronunciations. Underline the part of each word that is sometimes pronounced from the spelling. Use a dictionary if you are unsure.

- |           |               |                 |           |             |
|-----------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. arctic | 3. conduit    | 5. handkerchief | 7. kiln   | 9. wont     |
| 2. brooch | 4. forecastle | 6. hover        | 8. schism | 10. worsted |

## **SOME COMMON LINGUISTIC FALLACIES**

The widespread belief that languages somehow have souls and that they in some way reflect the racial, national, and even spiritual characteristics of those who speak them cannot be supported by any available evidence. It is obvious that the technological, economic, and cultural development of a people is reflected in the word stock of its language; one would not expect to find words meaning 'nail' in languages spoken by those who live in thatched lean-tos or igloos, or a word meaning 'God' (in contrast to 'god') among those who are polytheistic, or for that matter words designating any of the material and spiritual phenomena peculiar to Western European culture among those who have no concern whatever with this particular culture. But the presence or absence of specific vocabulary items is no real test of linguistic soul—whatever that may mean—nor of the efficacy of a language for those who speak it.

When the great Danish Anglicist Otto Jespersen declared that "as the language is, so also is the nation," it is doubtful that he had vocabulary items

in mind. Nevertheless, he was to some extent considering matters that really have nothing to do with language per se, but rather with matters of style. English is, he said, "methodical, energetic, business-like and sober," not much given to "finery and elegance," and opposed to pedantic restrictions of any sort—thus evincing the very characteristics that he saw, or fancied he saw, and admired in the English nation.<sup>4</sup> It is highly doubtful that the linguistic characteristics that he so admired in English reflect in any way the collective soul—if we can conceive of such a thing—of the English-speaking peoples of the world, or even those who have chosen to stay at home in England.

It is unlikely, however, that when he was writing in 1905 Jespersen had in mind anything quite so specific as Edmund Wilson's belief that, just as the will of the ancient Jewish people "finds expression in the dynamic verb forms [of classical Hebrew], so the perdurability of the people is manifested in what may be called the physical aspects of the language."<sup>5</sup> Nor would Jespersen, it is needless to say, have been astonished, as was V. S. Pritchett, that in Germany "agreeable, straightforward people speak German, a language bursting with grammatical complexities, and not a nonchalant, grammarless tongue like our own."<sup>6</sup> We can forgo here any detailed comment on Pritchett's identification of grammar with a particular system employing a comparatively high degree of **inflection**—the modification of the form of words, usually by means of endings, to indicate grammatical relationships. To suppose, however, that English is grammarless because it has considerably fewer such inflectional modifications than German is to be unaware of the manifold other grammatical devices by which we communicate with one another—quite aside from the fact that any language must have grammar, which is to say a system.

T. R. Fyvel, writing in the *Spectator* (London), shows an even more extreme disapproval of the German language, believing it to be partly responsible for the rise of Nazism: "to explain how the scum of the earth came to seize control in Germany must lead one far beyond the unemployment days and Versailles, deep into the nature of the German romantic movement and the structure of the German language . . ."<sup>7</sup> Somewhat more vehement toward yet another language is Miriam Chapin in *How People Talk* (p. 86):

Quite a case could be made out for the assertion that if the Japanese had not spoken such a thoroughly cussed language, they would never have let their rulers embark on such a career of conquest. . . . If the

<sup>4</sup>*Growth and Structure of the English Language*, 9th ed. (New York, 1956), p. 17. First published in 1905.

<sup>5</sup>"On First Reading Genesis," *The New Yorker*, May 15, 1954, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup>"Germany," *Holiday*, May 1959, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup>March 13, 1961, p. 301.

ordinary Japanese had spoken Chinese, had known his sensible, rather godless neighbor, he could hardly have accepted so readily the doctrine that China must be bombed and bayoneted into the East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

The connection that these authors so clearly see between language and political philosophy, of course, exists only in the realm of linguistic folklore; nevertheless, for the linguist to doubt the existence of such a connection is to bring down coals of fire upon his head, so deeply rooted are such notions. An amateur linguistic judgment that is at least partly accurate is the bromide attributed to Queen Victoria, to the effect that although German is a very difficult language, German children seem to have no trouble speaking it.

This leads us into another tenet dear to the hearts of those who are fond of speculating about language—that some languages are intrinsically more difficult than others. While it is perfectly true that an English-speaking adult would have more difficulty learning a totally unrelated tongue (say Turkish or Chinese) than a closely related one (say German or Dutch) or even a more remotely related one (say Russian or Greek), it does not follow that Turkish and Chinese are intrinsically more difficult languages than those belonging to the great Indo-European family of languages, to which English also belongs. The fact is that Turkish and Chinese children have acquired a certain mastery of the grammatical structure of their languages at about the same stage of life as American and English children—at five years or a little earlier. And this is true of all children all over the world. It must be stressed that we are here referring to **grammar**—the system by which we communicate orally—not to vocabulary items, which we go on acquiring all our lives. At the age of five we were all able to say all we wanted to say, without knowing such elegant items as *charisma*, *mystique*, and *viable*; and if at that tender age we used forms like *you was*, *swang* (for *swung*), and *don't never*, we were not using un-English forms at all, as the history of our language shows, but merely currently unfashionable ones.

Esthetic judgments of a language or a dialect are completely subjective and hence can have no real validity; they merely indicate what one likes to hear. Such judgments are therefore eschewed by the linguist. It is, however, widely believed that certain languages are more “beautiful” or more “musical” than others—for instance, that Italian is somehow more beautiful, more musical than other languages. When a well-known professor of Italian descent was asked in a television interview (no more ill-informed than most such interviews that deal with language) what was the most beautiful language, he attempted, quite correctly, to evade the question; when the interviewer came forth, as was practically inevitable, with the question “Isn’t Italian the most musical language?” the good professor, realizing that this was no occasion for disputatiousness, would say no more than, Well, he supposed

that most operas were written to be sung in that language. This subterfuge was good in a way, for as a rule linguists do not contribute to the popularity of their craft when they refuse to corroborate popular misconceptions.

John Temple Graves, for many years a distinguished writer and publicist in the American Deep South, stated that in his opinion French was the most beautiful of languages, though it is unlikely that all would agree with his dictum that a particular type of southern American English—that used by educated speakers—was the second most beautiful. His statement, obviously *ex cathedra*, is so characteristic of the certainty of the cultivated layman about such matters that it is worth quoting: “The true—which is to say the educated—Southern accent is, next to French, the most beautiful in the world,” going on to point out that “it pronounces its ‘I’ gently rather than as if opening wide for the throat doctor”; furthermore, “it drops its final ‘g’ [he is certainly not referring to the final *g* in *bag* and the like, though he seems here to be saying so, but rather seems to have present participles in mind] but not without a trace—just as the French drop the final ‘n.’” Then, not having quite sufficiently displayed his phonological acumen regarding degrees of *g*-dropping, he explains that “the ‘g’ isn’t quite heard, but it is there.”<sup>8</sup> One wonders how Dr. Graves—he received at least one honorary doctorate in the course of his long and genuinely distinguished journalistic career—could declare without hesitation that the “true Southern accent” is that used by educated speakers, leaving out of the question his certainty that it is the second most beautiful in the world. If by *true* he means something like ‘preserving older, traditional regional characteristics’—and it is difficult to see what else he could mean—then the beauty prize should go to the speech of the folk, comparatively uncontaminated as it is by the schoolma’am’s artificial notions of correctness and elegance.

What is most notable, however, is that here is none of the irritating timorousness or hesitation that is frequently characteristic of the dicta of the professionally trained student, who would probably be so tiresome as to suggest that the notion that one language or type of language is more beautiful than another usually depends upon such nonlinguistic factors as who is doing the speaking (a cockney costermonger or Sir John Gielgud?), to some extent upon the agreeableness of the subject, and to a large extent upon who is doing the listening. Not all speakers of English find Graves’s “true Southern accent” pleasant to listen to, as we have noted above; we have seen that in

<sup>8</sup>“This Morning,” a syndicated column printed in the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 1, 1958, p. 4. Compare Graves’s statement with that of a former director of the speech and hearing clinic of the University of Florida’s Department of Speech, as reported in the Gainesville (Fla.) *Sun* of November 15, 1949: “The standard Southern speech is the most musical of any regional dialect.” He hastened to add, however, that he was not talking about a “drawl,” *kain’t*, *you-all*, and *honeychile*, though it is difficult for a linguist to see what is so “unmusical” about these.

certain regions of our country there is a well-defined, if unreasoning, prejudice against southern speech, and there are even regions where, by and large, any type of speech other than that used locally is disliked and where those who use it are objects of suspicion or discrimination. To use an example suggested by the quotation from Graves's article, it would be very difficult, not to say impossible, to demonstrate that the **dental nasal** (as in *walkin'*) is more beautiful than the **velar nasal** (often written *ng*, as in *walking*). The articulation of the partially velarized nasal—the strange, almost-but-not-quite-dropped final *g* cited by Graves<sup>9</sup>—must be left to the imagination.

A commentator who found all varieties of American English displeasing to his ears was the American critic Van Wyck Brooks, who described our national speech as "the mud-turtle language . . . spoken as if one had mud in the mouth," going on to say that "in this mere viscous noise every syllable is blurred or burred; there is no precision or clarity; no vowel has its value."<sup>10</sup> He quoted with approval the rhetorical question of William Dean Howells, who obviously also considered himself something of an authority on American speech: "Who can defend the American accent, which is not so much an accent as a whifle, a snuffle, a twang?" Such commentary by distinguished literary men throws no light on the English language spoken in America; it does, however, clearly reflect tastes and attitudes, which the linguist is likely to consider less important to the study of language than information painstakingly and unemotionally acquired.

But so great is the temptation to make subjective judgments about linguistic phenomena or to draw subjective nonlinguistic conclusions that even the revered Jespersen succumbed to it when he referred to the native Polynesian language of Hawaii as being "full of music and harmony,"<sup>11</sup> and hence, one would suppose, beautiful. Jespersen attributed this music and harmony to the facts that Polynesian lacks consonant sequences and that all its words end in vowels, for example, *aloha oe* and *Liliuokalani*. Now, all this is purely subjective—a matter of what one happens to consider musical and beautiful.

But not every lay observer finds all vowels musical and beautiful. Harry Irvine, an English actor long a resident in the United States, considered the vowel used by all speakers of Standard English in *hat* and *hand* "excruciatingly ugly,"<sup>12</sup> while Windsor P. Daggett, a teacher of speech, considered the

<sup>9</sup>"Dropping the *g*" is popular terminology for using the dental nasal (as in *thin*) rather than the velar nasal (as in *thing*). The notion that a "*g* sound" is actually dropped is reflected in such spellings as the above-cited *walkin'*.

<sup>10</sup>*From a Writer's Notebook*. The relevant passage is reprinted in the *Saturday Review*, January 4, 1958, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>*The Actor's Art and Job* (New York, 1942), p. 48. Cited by Jayne Crane [Harder], "Quest for a Standard: A Study of Stage Diction," *Southern Speech Journal*, XV (1950), 282.



stressed vowel of *father* “the most sonorous sound in English”;<sup>13</sup> he was so enamored of this lovely vowel that he recommended its use in words in which it has never occurred in modern times in either British or American English.

As for consonant sounds, every lay commentator on language knows that those of German are “harsh” and “guttural.”<sup>14</sup> These terms presumably refer to the **velar fricative** written *ch* in *ach*—a sound that we who speak English lost long ago but continue writing as *gh*, as in *through* and *though*; in *rough*, *tough*, and *enough* it has been replaced by quite another sound. The fact that a highly similar fricative sound occurs also in Spanish—written *j*, *g*, and in a few old-fashioned names *x*—is ignored in such esthetic appraisals, for as every lay commentator knows perfectly well, Spanish is one of the “musical” languages. The very presence of the sound is not usually suspected, since in American school Spanish the sound written *h* at the head of English syllables replaces it: *Jaime* falls together with *Hymie*, *Gilda* with *Hilda*, and *Don Quixote* becomes simply “donkey hoty.”<sup>15</sup> The popular judgment of German is older than Nazism, of course, but quite in line with the Hollywood and television version of the Nazi as a goose-stepping, heel-clicking, hand-kissing beast whose German vocabulary consisted chiefly of *Achtung!* articulated in a particularly offensive, presumably “guttural” manner.

## Exercise

6. Below are some statements about language. Which are objective statements, whose truth can be tested by public evidence, and which are subjective statements, whose truth depends on how a person feels about things? Mark them *O* or *S*.
  1. The difference many people hear between the southern “drawl” and New York City “briskness” has nothing to do with actual differences in tempo.
  2. People who speak in a clipped, sharp way are usually irritating, whereas those who talk in a slow drawl are pleasant and easy-going.
  3. The complex nuances of the Russian verb reflect the complex psychology of the Russian mind.

<sup>13</sup>*Sounds of English: The Spoken Word Course* (New York, 1928), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup>A Hollywood dispatch regarding a German-born film player whose handsome appearance qualified him for “good guy” roles stated, “He’s working hard on his accent, which is German, but not the typical Nazi guttural,” this “Nazi guttural” apparently being regarded as even harsher than the non-Nazi variety.

<sup>15</sup>The substitution of English *h* for the more frictional Spanish sound “results in a heavy foreign accent” to Spanish ears, according to Robert P. Stockwell and J. Donald Bowen, *The Sounds of English and Spanish* (Chicago, 1965), p. 60.

4. The typical Russian verb has five times as many forms as the typical English verb.
5. The longest word in the English language is *pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis*.
6. The most musical word in the English language is *cellar-door*.
7. French is a soft, caressing language in which even a grocery list sounds romantic.
8. French has a higher percentage of sounds made in the nose than English does.
9. The best English is that of Shakespeare and the King James Bible.
10. The oldest recorded English is that of King Alfred.

## LINGUISTIC PURITY

Even more tenacious, perhaps, than the esthetic appraisal with which we have just been concerned is what we may call the moral attitude toward language. Those who hold this attitude conceive of hypothetically pure languages, set off in a linguistic outer space, spoken by no one, and guarded by the deity who presumably created them. It follows logically from such a notion that a given language may be more or less pure in proportion to its adherence to an ideal language. Thus we hear of "pure English," "pure French," and the like. Unless the above-mentioned concept actually exists, it is difficult to understand what is meant by purity as a linguistic concept. The purism of many Renaissance writers and scholars made somewhat more sense; to them "pure English" meant that which had come down to them from the speech of King Alfred's day, and they rejected loan-words, particularly those from Latin and Greek, as "inkhorn terms." The terms *pure*, *purist*, and *purism*, as used nowadays, have many, usually vague, meanings.

The concept of linguistic purity—whatever it may mean at a given time in the mind of a given commentator—furnishes an interesting chapter in the history of human folly. That sturdy linguistic patriot, Noah Webster, in a letter to Thomas Dawes written from New Haven in 1809, claimed that in the spelling changes recommended in his dictionary of 1806 he was endeavoring "to call back the language to the purity of former times."<sup>16</sup> (One wonders what the cutoff date would be.) But even with Webster constantly at work upon American English, the British commentator Captain Frederick Marryat thought it "remarkable how very debased the language has become in a short period in America," where it was not spoken "so purely or so classically as

<sup>16</sup> Reprinted by M. M. Mathews, *The Beginnings of American English* (Chicago, 1931), pp. 48–50.



. . . among the well-educated English.”<sup>17</sup> John Witherspoon, writing in 1781, believed that “he must have little judgment or great obstinacy who does not confess, that some late authors have written the English language with greater purity than those of the first character in former times.”<sup>18</sup> As far as it is possible to determine, purity was in Witherspoon’s opinion largely a matter of “taste, propriety, and accuracy.” At least, this is as close as he comes to defining it.<sup>19</sup> John Pickering, the scholarly jurisconsult who wrote the first dictionary of Americanisms—his *Vocabulary or Collection of Words and Phrases which have been supposed to be peculiar to the United States of America*, published in 1816—stated in the essay prefixed to that work his conviction that every American should give his attention to “the preservation of the *English language* in its purity throughout the United States.” He dourly anticipated that a time might come when Americans would not be able to understand the works of Milton, Pope, Swift, and Addison “without the aid of a translation,” and quoted with implicit approval a British commentator’s reference to “*that torrent of barbarous phraseology*, with which the *American* writers threaten to destroy the purity of the English language.”<sup>20</sup>

This absurd concept continues to thrive. We are all familiar with news items to the effect that the “purest” or “most perfect” English—which one would suppose to be inevitably the purest—is spoken in one place or another, the locale varying with the supposed expert who is doing the pontificating. George Bernard Shaw believed that the English of Dublin, his native city, was purer than that of London, while Eric Partridge reports that a famous Oxford don told him that “the best English spoken in Britain was that spoken in the cultured circles of Edinburgh.”<sup>21</sup> It would be easy, but quite wasteful of time and space, to multiply examples. Before we pass on to other matters, however, we should note that although “pure English” frequently means ‘cultivated speech,’ it is nonetheless averred that “pure Elizabethan English” may be heard in certain relatively isolated sections of the United States—all, it should be mentioned, settled long after the Elizabethan period. Here *pure* seems to mean ‘quaint, old-fashioned, unsophisticated’ rather than ‘cultured.’

The related notion of linguistic degeneration is almost equally vigorous. It is obviously an offshoot of the belief in the divine origin of language, which supposedly began to go to the dogs as soon as people began to speak. Thus,

<sup>17</sup>*Diary in America* (Philadelphia, 1839). His remarks on American speech are conveniently reprinted in Mathews, pp. 131–39.

<sup>18</sup>“The Druid,” No. V, contributed to the *Pennsylvania Journal*. Reprinted in Mathews, pp. 15–20.

<sup>19</sup>Edmund Wilson seems to have had little more in mind in the following critical statement: “Miss [Katherine Anne] Porter writes English of a purity and precision almost unique in contemporary fiction” (quoted in the *Saturday Review*, September 25, 1965, p. 35).

<sup>20</sup>The entire essay is reprinted in Mathews, pp. 65–76.

<sup>21</sup>(With John W. Clark) *British and American English Since 1900* (New York, 1951), p. 64.

the lay commentator may regard as degeneration all that the linguist regards as development.

Those who have had even a modicum of training in the classical languages are likely to hold as one of their cherished linguistic tenets that these languages once reached perfection and that every change from that time on is thus a steady and irreparable deterioration. From this fairly widespread, and obviously invalid, point of view, the Latin spoken in the early Middle Ages is "bad" Latin, though its later developments—French, Spanish, Italian, and the other so-called Romance languages—may be regarded as "good."<sup>22</sup> As one writer has stated, "The language of Voltaire is in origin bad Latin."<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, however, "good" and "bad" can mean very little, if anything, in linguistic contexts. Because there is no literature in the common Germanic tongue (Proto-Germanic) from which English, German, Dutch, the Scandinavian languages, and a few others have developed, it has never occurred to anyone to think of it in its early stages as particularly "pure" or otherwise, although the gradual loss of inflections that occurred in the development of Latin is paralleled in the various Germanic languages, among which, from this point of view, Icelandic has remained relatively pure.

### Exercise

7. The following quotations talk about purity in language. What do the words *pure* or *purity* seem to mean in each?

1. Purity of Speech and greatness of Empire have in all Countries still met together. The *Greeks* spoke best when they were in their glory of conquest. The *Romans* made those times the Standard of their Wit, when they subdu'd and gave Laws to the World. And from thence, by degrees, they declin'd to corruption, as their valour, their prudence, and the honor of their Arms did decay, and at last did even meet the *Northern Nations* half way in *Barbarism*, a little before they were overrun by their *Armies*.

Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society of London* (1667)

2. Thus difficult it is to understand the purity of English, and critically to discern not only good writers from bad, and a proper style from a corrupt, but also to distinguish that which is pure in a good author, from that which is vicious and corrupt in him.

John Dryden, Preface to *Sylvae* (1685)

<sup>22</sup>Similarly, many students of classical Greek are convinced that Modern Greek is "bad" Greek.

<sup>23</sup>Clark (with Partridge), p. 209.

3. It is with Languages, as it is with Animals, Vegetables, and all other Things; they have their Rise, their Progress, their Maturity, and their Decay: It cannot indeed be guess'd, in the Infancy of a People, how many Generations may pass, e'er their Language comes to this last Perfection; this depends on unforeseen Circumstances and Events; but when once a Tongue has acquir'd such a Degree of Excellence, it is not difficult to judge of it, and to see it; tho' it is as impossible to declare, how long it will continue in that Purity, as it was before to know, when it would arrive to it.

Leonard Welsted, *The State of Poetry* (1724)

4. On examining the language, and comparing the practice of speaking among the yeomanry of this country, with the stile of Shakespear and Addison, I am constrained to declare that the people of America, in particular the English descendants, speak the most *pure English* now known in the world. There is hardly a foreign idiom in their language; by which I mean, a *phrase* that has not been used by the best English writers from the time of Chaucer.

Noah Webster, *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789)

## CLIMATE AND SPEECH

In lay linguistic theory, sound change and dialectal and regional differences are frequently attributed to climate. Though there is no evidence that climate affects speech, the notion that it does so is very appealing to many. It seems to make sense, until one really thinks about it, that those who live in hot climates should “drawl,” “lose their *r*’s,” and “drop their *g*’s.” But the facts are that many speakers who live in such climates speak very rapidly indeed; that the *r* sound lost in coastal southern American speech (and also in eastern New England, though not in the inland South) is similarly lost in Standard British English; and that what is popularly referred to as “dropping the *g*” was current in Shakespeare’s day and had been so for nearly two centuries.<sup>24</sup>

But meteorological explanations of linguistic phenomena remain easy to

<sup>24</sup>For this last-mentioned phenomenon, see Helge Kökeritz, *Shakespeare’s Pronunciation* (New Haven, 1953), p. 313. In *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1937) H. C. Wyld says that “at the present time this habit obtains in practically all Regional dialects of the [English] South and South Midlands, and among large sections of speakers of Received [British] Standard English” (p. 289). Wyld presents a sizable body of evidence in spellings and rimes, to which Kökeritz adds more from Shakespearean puns. (See also below, p. 24.)

find. Even certain supposed characteristics of American English, as contrasted with British, have been attributed by one respected literary scholar to American "atmospheric conditions," for example, the initial stress in *contents* (which is, incidentally, somewhat more frequent nowadays in Standard British English than *conténts*).<sup>25</sup> Initial stress, as we shall see in Chapter 9, was a common Germanic characteristic. If climate had anything to do with its development in those prehistoric days, it is safe to say that it was not an American climate but a Northern European one. The tendency to stress even loan-words, like *contents*, on the first syllable is by no means exclusively American.

A supposed influence of physical geography, which includes climate, on human anatomy is alleged by the eminent British lexicographer and man of letters Eric Partridge as an explanation for certain types of English that differ from the British Standard (his "Southern Standard English"):

It must be borne in mind that the natural conditions, the physiography of Australia have, like the very similar conditions of South Africa, tended to produce a certain type of speech-organs, to which the dulcet sounds of Southern Standard English are not merely alien but impossible; they are equally, though in a different way, impossible to those people who live in the colder moister climates of Canada and New Zealand; the comparatively high-pitched voices of Australians (and of South Africans) resemble those of Indian people, especially the men, when they speak English—and for much the same climatic and other physiographic reasons. The nasality characterizing the speech of most Australians has arisen from the same influences: compare the nasality of much American pronunciation, a nasality more marked than that of Canadians.<sup>26</sup>

In passing, it should be mentioned that there is no evidence that the slight differences in the anatomical structure of the speech organs occurring from individual to individual, regardless of race, have anything more to do with speech differences than climate has.

## THE DANGERS OF SPECULATION

We have attempted in this opening chapter to show the fecklessness of certain untenable, if undeniably tenacious, popular notions about language. Our intention has been to pillory only those notions, not the individuals who in all sincerity hold fast to them. Inasmuch as many people who are otherwise well informed, but who know little or nothing of the principles underlying

<sup>25</sup>See Thomas Pyles, "A New Meteorological Theory of Stress," *Modern Language Notes*, LX (1945), 497-98.

<sup>26</sup>(With Clark), p. 85.

the professional study of language, love to speculate about linguistic phenomena, it is a great pity that their conclusions must so often be wrong. Any attempt by the linguist to show that such speculations are groundless is usually met with heartfelt resentment.

To cite a very apparent example of the dangers of mere speculation: Despite our many sound, scholarly dictionaries, people with no realization of the pitfalls in the science of etymology do not hesitate to transmit their theories of word origins to the "Letters" section of newspapers and magazines, just as if etymologies were everybody's game. Most of these etymological speculations are unfounded; one such, regarding the origin of the word *booze*, is discussed below in another connection (p. 335).<sup>27</sup>

As long as we prefer glamorous myths to more or less prosaic facts, we are not likely to get very far in our understanding—which can never really be more than partial—of language, man's greatest accomplishment. The vaporings of those who wish to be pundits about language doubtless make for entertaining and even thought-provoking reading, but when these fail to accord with the evidence painstakingly dug out by those who have done their homework—frequently quite dull fellows indeed—it is time to abandon the fantasies and to go along with the facts.

The effective, graceful, and artistic use of language is an accomplishment that we all admire, particularly when it results in the creation of great literature. But such a talent is not in itself sufficient to qualify one to make authoritative statements about language, any more than leading a godly, righteous, and sober life, in love and charity with one's neighbors—no mean accomplishment—qualifies one to set oneself up as a theologian.

## Exercises

8. Below are some words with fanciful origins invented by imaginative but uninformed people. Find the more probable though less romantic origin given in a dictionary.

1. *news*, supposed to be from the first letters of the words *north*, *east*, *west*, and *south*.

<sup>27</sup>Often the etymologies proposed by amateurs are, like that proposed for *booze*, far more appealing than the true ones. Almost everyone has heard, and many alas believe, the old chestnut about *sirloin* being so named because Henry VIII or James I or Charles II (one may take one's choice, for all three monarchs have figured as the protagonist in variants of the story) liked a loin of beef so much that he knighted it—or at least what remained of it—saying "Arise, Sir Loin." Indeed, it is likely that the later written form of the word has been affected by this charming story, which, according to the *OED*, was first told in 1655 by Thomas Fuller; the etymological spelling is that which occurred earlier—*surloin*. For the true origin of the word, one may consult any dictionary; it is considerably less quaint and glamorous than the folk etymology.

2. *hockey*, supposed to be from an Iroquois word, *ho-gee*, that early explorers heard the Indians cry as they whacked the puck and each other. The Europeans supposedly took the word to be the name of the game, whereas it actually meant 'It hurts!'
  3. *woman*, supposed to be from *womb* and *man*.
  4. *evil*, supposed to be from *live* spelled backwards, or to be an anagram of *vile*.
  5. *cabal*, supposed to be from the initials of the five ministers of King Charles II: Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale.
  6. *pantry*, supposed to be so called because it is the place where pots and pans are kept.
9. Which of the following statements are partly or wholly false, and which are true? Mark them *T* or *F*.
1. Those who speak and write English most effectively have the best claim to be considered authorities on the language.
  2. A person does not know a language until he knows how it is written.
  3. The pronunciation of a word is not determined by its spelling.
  4. The simple, straightforward grammar of English and the freedom with which the language adopts foreign words embody the democratic open-mindedness of the English-speaking peoples.
  5. No language is appreciably more difficult than any other for a child to learn.
  6. When a person decides one language is more beautiful than another, he is usually reacting to personal associations with people and circumstances that have little to do with the sound of the language itself.
  7. Although it is hardly possible to compare different languages with respect to their purity, it is easy to recognize that a single language has purer and less pure varieties.
  8. The belief that languages evolve to an ideal state from which they can only deteriorate is a subjective notion and so cannot be proved.
  9. Although the idea that the climate we live in affects the way we talk is superficially plausible, there is no reliable evidence to support it.
  10. Although through careful training anyone can learn to make a wide variety of sounds, racial differences in lip and skull shapes naturally produce different accents.



10. Below are some quotations that contain observations about language. Each has at least one mistaken notion in it or is based on some untenable assumption. Identify the wrong ideas.

1. Now, as we struggle with an ill Climate to improve the nobler Kinds of Fruits; are at the Expence of Walls to receive and reverberate the faint Rays of the Sun, and fence against the *Northern Blasts*; we sometimes by the Help of a good Soil equal the Productions of warmer Countries, who have no need to be at so much Cost or Care: It is the same Thing with respect to the politer Arts among us; and the same Defect of Heat which gives a Fierceness to our Natures, may contribute to that Roughness of our Language, which bears some Analogy to the harsh Fruit of colder Countries.

Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712)

2. The fate of the English tongue is like that of others. We know nothing of the scanty jargon of our barbarous ancestors; but we have specimens of our language when it began to be adapted to civil and religious purposes, and find it such as might naturally be expected, artless and simple, unconnected and concise.

Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*, No. 63 (1759)

3. It is not the Language, but the practice, that is in fault. The truth is, Grammar is very much neglected among us: and it is not the difficulty of the Language, but on the contrary the simplicity and facility of it, that occasions this neglect. Were the Language less easy and simple, we should find ourselves under a necessity of studying it with more care and attention. But as it is, we take it for granted, that we have a competent knowledge and skill, and are able to acquit ourselves properly, in our native tongue.

Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762)

4. In this important Work, we shall be led to observe, how Nations, like single Men, have their *peculiar* Ideas; how these *peculiar* Ideas become THE GENIUS OF THEIR LANGUAGE, since the *Symbol* must of course correspond to its *Archetype*; how the *wisest* Nations, having the *most* and *best* Ideas, will consequently have the *best* and *most copious* Languages; how others, whose Languages are motley and compounded, and who have borrowed from different Country

different Arts and Practices, discover by WORDS, to whom they are indebted for THINGS.

James Harris, *Hermes* (1771)

5. He [Lt. Lismahago] proceeded to explain his assertion that the English language was spoken with greater propriety at Edinburgh than in London. He said what we generally called the Scottish dialect was, in fact, true genuine old English, with a mixture of some French terms and idioms, adopted in a long intercourse betwixt the French and Scotch nations; that the modern English, from affectation and false refinement, had weakened, and even corrupted their language, by throwing out guttural sounds, altering the pronunciation and the quantity, and disusing many words and terms of great significance.

Tobias Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker* (1771)

6. But if there be not such a set of men [grammarians] in every country, to guard against the abuses and corruptions which popular use will necessarily introduce into every language; and if the youth of rank and fortune in the country, are not carefully instructed by such men in the principles of grammar; the language of that country, however perfect it may have been originally, will very soon become unlearned and barbarous. It is chiefly by such neglect that all the present languages of Europe are become corrupt dialects of languages that were originally good.

James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, *The Origin and Progress of Language* (1774–1809)



# 2

## THE MATTER OF USAGE

### "GOOD" AND "BAD" USAGE

People in general think of language, when they think of it at all, as either "good" or "bad." Thus, *you were* is good English; *you was* is bad English; *didn't do anything* is good; *didn't do nothing* is bad; and so on. Now, if by "bad" we meant 'not occurring in the usage of socially influential persons,' the derogatory adjective would provide a roughly accurate description of the present status of *you was* and *didn't do nothing*—only roughly because the awareness that many highly successful and influential men have used and even habitually use these particular locutions ought to make us somewhat distrustful of any simple two-valued approach to the matter of usage. Such locutions, condemned in classrooms and in letters to the editors of such journals as the *Saturday Review* and of various metropolitan newspapers, are used by aspirants to, and holders of, fairly high political offices in some parts of our country. Many older-generation businessmen, and a few professionals as well, particularly in our small towns, have also found that "bad English" is no hindrance to success. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that today the use of *you was* and *didn't do nothing*, selected more or less arbitrarily for purposes of illustration, is indeed a negative status-designator.

On the other hand, "good English" does not guarantee success of any sort; if it did, those teachers who know all the rules in the school grammars would have to be adjudged highly successful people. But the fact is that those who are highly successful by current standards usually evince a condescending,

patronizing, and at times even contemptuous attitude toward those who are presumably dedicated to teaching children such relatively trivial matters as the avoidance of *ain't* and *irregardless* and similar stigmatized constructions. And they would be quite right if these small matters really constituted the whole, or even the most important, business of the teacher of English, for the rules governing these matters can be easily learned, and their mastery will not in itself make one a stylish or even an interesting speaker. Still, it cannot be denied that there is widespread, if unreasoning, prejudice against certain forms of speech, and that younger speakers had best eschew these forms, even though they may have been used by quite respectable speakers and writers. We shall later examine such forms in detail.

Widespread, if only thinly spread, literacy has made even the so-called culturally disadvantaged aware that the use of various locutions condemned in English classes may debar them from those circles in which it is presumed they yearn to move. Those who have achieved worldly success despite their use of such locutions are by and large, as we have said, older people living in semiurban and rural communities. When they have gone to their eternal reward, as is shortly inevitable, bad English need no longer be heard in high places, for it presumably will not be perpetuated by their children and grandchildren, who, given a modicum of intelligence and motivation, will have learned "proper" usage in school. Everyone who learns an approved set of grammatical precepts will then be speaking good English—this at least is the theory. What will have been gained is anybody's guess. Certainly it will not be clarity, for the *you was* form used in the singular throughout the eighteenth century and defended by no less a mahatma than Noah Webster made possible a clear distinction between second person singular and plural, a distinction impossible in current Standard English.

As for the double or multiple negative construction, we lost a useful device for emphasis when it was arbitrarily outlawed. The simple man who says "I ain't going to do nothing about it" has a distinct rhetorical advantage over those of us who reject this emphatic construction, also frequently used by our earlier writers.

But as every modern schoolboy should know, in mathematics two minuses make a plus, and this axiom was most effectively applied to language by Bishop Robert Lowth in his highly influential *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762): "two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative." This arbitrary application of mathematical logic to English speech has triumphed completely in current Standard English, though the old "illogical" construction is still very much alive in the use of the folk. It is of course impossible that *I ain't going to do nothing about it* could ever be understood as *I am going to do something about it*—a little white lie sometimes employed in teaching children. We all understand this socially outlawed construction to mean exactly what it has always meant; we all

recognize it as simply a more emphatic, if lowbrow, way of saying *I'm not going to do anything about it*. But the Pyrrhic victory against this historically respectable and highly effective rhetorical device was won a long time ago. Lost it we have, as far as educated speech is concerned. And no one is likely to start a crusade to restore it; it simply doesn't make enough difference to us.

But if "bad English" (or, alternatively, "bad grammar") is used to mean something like "un-English," as it frequently is, then the constructions we have just been discussing, and a good many others stigmatized with almost equal vigor, cannot be considered bad. Moreover, they have not been invented by simple, unschooled people; they are not corruptions but merely old-fashioned locutions like the much more recently tabooed *he don't*, which has also lingered on in the speech of the folk and in that of a few older members of the landed gentry in both America and England. They can certainly not be considered un-English. English authors, as we have indicated, used the double or multiple negative construction up to about the time of Shakespeare; even the learned and academically respectable Francis Bacon used at least one. "He was never no violent man."<sup>1</sup> Chaucer, who wrote long before it occurred to anyone to count negatives, sprinkles them about rather lavishly—and, it should not be forgotten, stylishly. We need not seek out obscure examples; in the oft-quoted lines from the General Prologue to his *Canterbury Tales*, he used no fewer than four negatives to express heightened negative intent: "He nevere yet no vileynye ne seyde/In al his lyf unto no maner wight"—in effect, "He didn't never say no rudeness in all his life to no manner of man." The cancellation process formulated by Bishop Lowth and taken seriously ever since evidently concerned Chaucer as little as it concerned Bacon and our other early writers.

The now-condemned third person singular *don't* is not, as is frequently supposed, a corruption of *doesn't*; on the contrary, it occurred at least a century earlier than *doesn't*<sup>2</sup> and was frequent in cultivated speech throughout the nineteenth century and not uncommon in the early 1900's—probably up to about 1920. It is more or less usual in the dialogue of W. S. Gilbert and George Bernard Shaw (one would not expect to find either *don't* or *doesn't* in expository writing). Otto Jespersen has pointed out that Lord Byron used the third person singular *don't* repeatedly in *Don Juan* and that it was "used constantly" in such books as Hughes's *Tom Brown*, which is about young English gentlemen at Rugby. He has also given citations from Shelley, Jane Austen, Kingsley, and Meredith (*op. cit.*, p. 123).

It would seem then that what is thought of today as bad English is fre-

<sup>1</sup>Otto Jespersen, *Negation in English and Other Languages* (Copenhagen, 1917), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Karl W. Dykema, "An Example of Prescriptive Linguistic Change: 'Don't' to 'Doesn't,'" *English Journal*, XXXVI (1947), 372.

quently nothing more horrifying than archaic good English. And this is true of pronunciation as well as of inflection and syntax. In Alexander Pope's "Good-nature with good-sense must ever join;/To err is human, to forgive, divine" (*Essay on Criticism* II.324-25) the pronunciation indicated by the rime *join/divine* was characteristic of the courtly speech of his day. It survives in our day only in unsophisticated speech, where it is obviously no corruption. Those who say "jine" and "bile" do not do so because they are too simple-minded to say *join* and *boil* our way; it is merely that they have preserved the older pronunciation, which does not reflect the changes that have occurred in present Standard English. Pope's riming of *besieged* and *obliged* (Prologue to the *Satires*, 204-5) likewise indicates an older pronunciation of the second word that was current in old-fashioned, mainly rustic, speech until well into the second decade of the present century. When Jonathan Swift rimed *dispensing* with *ensign* in "The Progress of Marriage" and *brewing* with *ruin* in "To a Lady"—to mention only two of a number of such rimes—he was using the pronunciation of the ending *-ing* usual in his day. The current "educated" pronunciation—in H. C. Wyld's words, "an innovation, based upon the spelling"<sup>3</sup>—did not become widespread in the Modern English period until the early years of the nineteenth century. Nowadays the importance of the innovation has been so stressed as a sort of shibboleth that one occasionally hears such pronunciations as "lunching" for *luncheon*, "mounting" for *mountain*, and (from a cab driver in Evanston, Illinois) "Evingston." The occurrence of such "overcorrect" pronunciations as those just cited indicates the ineffectualness of some of our teaching of usage; in other words, "overtaching" those who lack a cultured, linguistically sophisticated tradition to the extent that they self-consciously avoid such pronunciations as "huntin', shootin', an' fishin'" may easily result in what we may call overpronunciation. The plain fact is that this phenomenon, popularly but quite inaccurately called dropping the *g*, looks worse than it sounds. For example, in ordinary running speech most of us would actually say "As I was walkin' down the street . . ." It only *looks* ignorant, like "wimmin" and "likker" for *women* and *liquor*.

While we are not justified, then, in regarding many of the currently stigmatized constructions as un-English, the fact that *didn't never*, *he don't*, *you was*, and other such locutions were once good English is no justification whatever for recommending their use in contemporary English; nor does any objective student of usage do so. The taboo against them may have been senseless and arbitrary in the beginning, but that has nothing to do with their present status. Most, if not all, taboos are in fact senseless and arbitrary, like those governing fashion; and, as George Campbell wrote in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), while Bishop Lowth was still very much alive, "language

<sup>3</sup>A *History of Modern Colloquial English*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1936), p. 289.

is purely a species of fashion," defining good use as "reputable, national, and present use."<sup>4</sup> The many-sided Joseph Priestley, best known as the discoverer of oxygen, had less effectively said much the same in his pre-Lowthian *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761). Good sons of the Age of Enlightenment that they were, Priestley favored analogy to decide between variant usages (but only as the last resource), and Campbell, inconsistently with his doctrine, proceeded in precisely the manner of Bishop Lowth to pillory as "barbarisms, solecisms, and improprieties" locutions from such "reputable, national, and present" (or recent) writers as Addison, Swift, Bolingbroke, and Smollett, reaching back a bit to rap Milton's knuckles.

The objection to such locutions as the ones previously cited—historically respectable though they may be—is a very valid one, even though it is frequently based upon the invalid assumption that they represent degeneration. Actually, the employment of such locutions in current speech is roughly comparable to eating with one's knife—once a perfectly good way of doing it, but certainly no longer acceptable. Chaucer's Lady Prioress, who never dipped her fingers deep in the sauce—probably never deeper than the first joint—would not have hesitated to ply a knife at table, though she would probably have eaten with her fingers most of the time, like other fine ladies of her day. But table manners, like manners in speech, have changed since that day. The inevitability of the latter type of change was well recognized by the Prioress's creator when he wrote "Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge/ Within a thousand yeer, and wordes tho [then]/ That hadden pris [value], now wonder nyce and straunge/ Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so" (*Troilus and Criseyde* II.22–25). The fact is, it takes considerably less than "a thousand yeer." Just as the third person singular *don't* and the second person *was*—once irreproachable usages—are now considered "bad English," so our present "good English" may one day be stigmatized as boorish (like the Prioress's eating habits) or at least "quaint" (an adjective often used to describe Chaucer's English by those who are not very familiar with it).

## Exercises

- Below are some statements about what makes sentences like *You was not ready to go nowheres* and *You weren't ready to go anywhere* "bad" or "good." Mark each statement *T* or *F*.
  - "Good" English is that used by persons who are influential in society; "bad" English is that which they avoid.

<sup>4</sup> Apposite parts of Campbell's book are reprinted by John Algeo and Thomas Pyles, *Problems in the Origins and Development of the English Language* (New York, 1966), pp. 207–11.



2. "Bad" English is less clear and less emphatic than "good" English, which communicates its meaning more effectively. ⚡
  3. "Bad" English is often confused in its meanings; "good" English is logical and reasonable. ⚡
  4. "Good" English is the only true English; "bad" English is actually not English at all.
  5. The "bad" English of one time may have been "good" at an earlier period, and vice versa. ⚡
  6. "Good" and "bad" English are matters of fashion, like skirt lengths—only they change more gradually. ⚡
2. Rules about usage are sometimes characterized as proscriptive, prescriptive, and descriptive. What do the three terms mean? Use a dictionary if you are unsure.
  3. Is each of the following rules proscriptive, prescriptive, or descriptive?
    1. Always pronounce the *g* in words like *thinking* and *hoping*.
    2. Never use more than one negative in a sentence.
    3. The expression *you was* is generally taken as a sign of limited education or low social standing.
    4. The *t* in *often* should not be pronounced.
    5. *Irregardless* is nonstandard English.
    6. The form *whom* should be used whenever the word is the object of a preposition.
  4. Which of the following sentences are un-English; which are merely unfashionable; and which are in standard use?
    1. We seen the three of yours warshing and rinching the dishes.
    2. I have the car of my uncle borrowed.
    3. Albert wanted to secretly watch the girls swim.
    4. He knowed the thing what he said warn't true.
    5. That's the one he tried to pull the rug out from under.
    6. Tanya is knowing that the train has arrived an hour ago.

## OLD WORDS AND NEW

Those who believe that English is going downhill are greatly concerned with matters of word choice. It is perfectly natural that many neologisms from the worlds of advertising and bureaucracy should seem tasteless to literary people, who are even likely to make predictions of doom when these

seep down into the ordinary, everyday usage of ordinary, everyday people. Taste is, however, to a great extent subjective and to an even greater extent ephemeral; it is hardly a linguistic matter, even though the linguist may be a literary man with pronounced esthetic preferences.

The fact may be regrettable, but it is nonetheless true that the world is full of sprucely dressed, tastefully coiffured, highly prosperous, and influential people who refer to discoveries or disclosures of any sort as *breakthroughs* (almost always "major" or "revolutionary") and to two or more people as *personnel*, who *moisturize* their hair instead of merely dampening, wetting, or moistening it; *escalate* rather than increase; and *break down* information rather than merely classify or analyze it—as did the Chicago *Tribune* editorial writer when he somewhat ineptly stated, "Employers may receive a form, early next year, on which they will have to report to the office of equal employment opportunity the total number of workers on their payrolls, broken down by sex . . ." (December 16, 1965, p. 20). It is likely, if we may judge from what has happened many times before, that many of today's neologisms will survive and in time pass into literary usage.

Ironically, in at least two condemned usages, the reprehended words have by what is apparently sheer coincidence returned to earlier meanings, a fact of course unperceived by those who regard these meanings as results of linguistic degeneration—the ever-present fear of purists. The words in question are *disinterested* and *presently*. The first meant both 'impartial' and 'not interested' in the seventeenth century. Its earliest recorded meaning in 1612 is that which, inconsistently enough with their professed principles, modern purists object to; the meaning that they favor was not recorded until 1659 (*OED*). Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the word seems to have had both meanings, without any notable degeneration in communication. Then, however, the meaning 'impartial' seems to have driven out the meaning 'not interested' until fairly recently when, to the disgust of those who regard themselves as guardians of linguistic purity, it came back into vogue. There seems little to do about it now; the earlier reprehended meaning is certainly the one more commonly used by speakers under fifty. *Presently* in the sense of 'at the present moment,' as in *He is presently traveling in Japan*, has also been vigorously lambasted; but that is precisely what it meant in literary English from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. The toned-down meaning 'in a little while,' which is approved by modern purists, developed so imperceptibly, according to the *OED*, that early examples, especially before the mid-seventeenth century, are doubtful.

There remain those, however, who think it desirable to resist the change in "forme of speche" that Chaucer referred to and fear that, without policing, language will in time become unintelligible, though they can never explain in precise terms how this will come to pass. Actually, it is not a matter of communication, but rather one of linguistic etiquette, which involves a

proper choice between two alternatives no more crucial than the choice between a salad fork and a dinner fork. Those proscribed locutions that are survivals from older standard speech communicate very adequately indeed, as we have seen in the case of the double negative and *you was*; and it is highly doubtful that anyone ever misunderstood *have went*, *we sung*, or *was writ*.

Nowadays no linguistic guardian exercises himself much over *to contact*, though only a few years ago, when it was fairly new, this verb was in great disrepute in classrooms and many editorial offices. Aside from the unprepossessing qualities of many who first used the verb, the principal objection seems to have been that it was new. This is hardly a valid objection; for *to silence*, *to finger*, *to book*, *to table*, and a good many other verbs formed from nouns were also at one time new. But, when *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* came out in 1961, many critics were scandalized at its inclusion of *to finalize*, though it had been used in formal speeches by two of our presidents and had been listed, somewhat unobtrusively, in *Webster's Second* of 1934. *To finalize* has perhaps a more than even chance of survival, even though one does not hear it much nowadays—perhaps because it has had a bad press and to some extent because the ghostwriters who in our time provide the texts for political speeches are more aware of the disfavor in which it is held than are the high officials who publicly read these speeches. In any event, it is a safe bet that it will be not *finalize* but some newer linguistic tidbit that will cause a comparable degree of hypertension when *Webster's Fourth* appears.

## Exercise

5. Each of the following sentences contains an italicized neologism. Find some other way to express the meaning in each case. Which are unnecessary because there is already a short, reasonably exact equivalent of the term, and which are clearly useful additions to the vocabulary?
  1. Governor Reagan left the Democratic party because his *conceptualization* of the role of government changed over the years.
  2. Were you *consultated* on this, Governor?
  3. —Would you mind if I made an imposition and . . . ?  
—No, go ahead and *imposish*.
  4. Moscow has reason to be apprehensive over the impact of Stalin's daughter on the mass mind; she is charmingly *videogenic*.
  5. The discussion concerned recently discovered *pulsars*—celestial objects of some kind that have been detected by the pulsating radio waves they emit.



6. The election, if it follows past form, will be decided on personalities and picayunish issues rather than on *hard-core* problems.
7. They are suspicious people who imagine conspiracies and conceive unending *webworks* of intrigue.
8. Psychedelic mystics want to *rap*—have rapport—with the world, with dogs and trees and everything.
9. She is a Phi Beta Kappa whose girlhood goal was to be *intel-luptuous*.

## PRESCRIPTIVISM AND USAGE

Those who fancy themselves preservers of standards in language, most of whom would hotly deny the appellation “purist,” believe quite sincerely that their stand is highly traditional and regard as dangerous subversives those scholars who devote themselves to the objective description of their first-hand observations. Many who righteously maintain that split infinitives and terminal prepositions are cardinal sins regard themselves as forward-looking men of liberal temperament; they writhe in spiritual torment at any imputation that their notions may be interpreted as linguistic insecurity. But, as we have seen in the preceding pages, the feeling of a need for some sort of linguistic regulation other than that provided by usage is not really very old. Many modern notions of correctness are by no means as time-honored as we are sometimes led to believe; on the other hand, many a construction condemned by the schools is in fact hallowed by generations of cultivated usage.

The sad truth—sad to those who consider themselves preservers of ancient purity, whatever it means to them—is that the English language got along very well without external regulation for a good many centuries, during which there grew up a literature greatly admired by the civilized world. Amazing as it may seem, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton wrote without benefit of dictionary or handbook. Moreover, the language showed no signs of degenerating into the state of chaotic gibberish nowadays predicted if policing should be relaxed; the deterioration feared by the *New York Times* in its editorial on the publication of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (October 12, 1961)<sup>5</sup> is nothing to keep any of us awake nights. To blame “the impairment of the art of clear communication” on what the *Times* regards as “the permissive school [of linguistics] that has been busily extending its beachhead on English instruction in the schools” is to ignore the more

<sup>5</sup>This remarkably ill-informed diatribe is reprinted in *Dictionaries and THAT Dictionary*, ed. James Sledd and Wilma R. Ebbitt (Chicago, 1962), pp. 78–79.

likely possibility that some persons are unable to communicate clearly because they have nothing very clear to communicate when they get beyond the bread-and-butter affairs of everyday life or simply because they are deficient in vocabulary. The professor may find himself at the same disadvantage when he tries to tell a garage mechanic, who knows all the proper terms for automotive gadgets, what is wrong with what he is accustomed to regarding merely as the "innards" of his car.

In any case, the present widespread regard for prescriptivism and regulation has no deep roots in the past. There is nothing very traditional about it; it is in fact a rather new concern. Disappointing as the fact may be to all good democrats, in olden days standards were based upon fashionable usage, which in effect was that of a royal court. It was the usage of proud and arrogant people who gave little thought to human dignity and civil rights, largely because such concepts did not exist for them, and who would have admitted schoolmasters to their stately houses only by the side door. Certainly they would have scorned precepts regarding their use of their native tongue coming from those whom they regarded as drudges. With all their lack of concern for dangling participles, double negatives, and terminal prepositions, they were well-bred, suave, sophisticated people by the standards of their day; and even illiteracy was no real handicap for those who could employ scribes to do their writing. They talked as they jolly well pleased, and those on the lower rungs of the social ladder studied to learn their ways, for the usage of the well-born and the well-fixed was the unquestioned good usage of the day. As their manners and their clothes and their tastes in mistresses were admired and imitated, so was their speech, even if it was rustic, like that of the learned Sir Walter Raleigh, country gentleman as well as courtier, who is said to have spoken the dialect of his native Devonshire to his dying day.

Alas for the ideals of egalitarians, the fact remains that persons of consequence in any age and in any social order are ever likely to talk and write in their own way, not as somebody thinks they ought to, and to let the chips fall as they may. A violent social upheaval ultimately results in nothing more than substituting one group of consequential people for another. Professor A. S. C. Ross in his famous "Linguistic Class-Indicators in Present-Day English"<sup>6</sup> reports that in Russia "it is obviously desirable to speak in a non-U [non-upper-class] manner rather than in a U [upper-class] one," which is merely an amusing switch, not an abandonment of linguistic class-distinction. Despite the vague and idealized humanitarianism of present-day demagogues, it is highly improbable that talented and accomplished people (or in an aristocratic society those of lesser gifts whose status is merely derived from birth and breeding) will consent to amend their natural speech habits. Such

<sup>6</sup>First published in 1954 in a Finnish journal, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, and reprinted in condensed and simplified form in *Noblesse Oblige*, ed. Nancy Mitford (London, 1956), pp. 11-36.

fortunate persons frequently disappoint the school grammarians. To the consternation of those who would like to put language into some sort of strait jacket, they speak very much as they please—that is, as they learned to speak in early childhood—without worrying in the least about their grammar, which with undemocratic arrogance they assume to be good simply because it is their own and that of others of their class. Sir Winston Churchill for instance began a public speech with “This is me, Winston Churchill”; said “like you and I,” according to one reporter<sup>7</sup> (if he was misquoted, it is doubtful that he really would have cared); and wrote in quite formal context of “faithful service to whomsoever holds the talisman.”<sup>8</sup>

For using the *is me* construction (in a recorded address, made in New Haven in 1946) Churchill, grandson of a Duke of Marlborough, was severely lambasted by American purists, who felt that he had grievously betrayed them and all they stood for. One letter writer to *Time* thought, however, that what he regarded as a solecism was “perhaps a Churchillian bit of undress in order to gain the approval of the masses” (April 29, 1946, p. 14). It is doubtful, though, that Churchill would have varied his somewhat old-fashioned, aristocratic speech for any man, even if he had been aware of the bourgeois disapproval of this idiom, which is the common property of the highest and the lowest in the social scale. Henry Alford, an eminent Victorian scholar and Dean of Canterbury, wrote in 1863 that the construction in question was one “which every one uses” and that “Grammarians (of the smaller order) protest; schoolmasters (of the lower kind) prohibit and chastise; but English men, women, and children go on saying it, and will go on saying it as long as the English language is spoken.”<sup>9</sup>

The same might well be said of Churchill’s employment of the subjective form of the pronoun as the object of a preposition (*like you and I*), a construction particularly likely to occur when the pronoun is preceded by *and*. Although here again Sir Winston was not playing the game according to the rules, he was by no means the only distinguished writer to have used this construction. Shakespeare wrote, “all debts are cleerd betweene you and I” in *The Merchant of Venice* (III.ii.321), and Otto Jespersen cites instances of the subjective form after *like* in the works of such writers as Shelley, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Robert Louis Stevenson.<sup>10</sup> As the object of prepositions other than *like*, it occurs somewhat less frequently. It has, however, occurred after *for* in both the King’s English (that of George VI)<sup>11</sup> and the Queen’s

<sup>7</sup>The reporter was Sir John Slessor, in *The Central Blue*. The entire sentence is quoted, with no relevance to the grammar, in a review of Slessor’s book in *Time*, April 1, 1957, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup>Cited by Sir Ernest Gowers, *Plain Words: Their ABC* (New York, 1954), pp. 227–28.

<sup>9</sup>Cited by G. H. McKnight, *Modern English in the Making* (New York, 1928), p. 525.

<sup>10</sup>*A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (Copenhagen, 1909–49), VII, 233.

<sup>11</sup>For an instance, see Thomas Pyles, *The Origins and Development of the English Language* (New York, 1964), p. 242, n. 67.

(that of Elizabeth II).<sup>12</sup> Lest it be supposed that among the mighty this is an error peculiar to the House of Windsor, it must be pointed out, at risk of committing lese majesty, that the usage has also occurred in the speech of such prominent Americans as Dwight David Eisenhower<sup>13</sup> and Lyndon Baines Johnson. The latter, once a teacher himself, had apparently forgotten the lessons learned at the Southwest (Texas) State Teachers College when he declared to a conference of Democratic governors in 1964 that "it is fitting today for you and I . . . to spend these moments now looking ahead."<sup>14</sup> He was doubtless speaking extemporaneously, for one would suppose that even the humblest of his staff of ghostwriters would certainly have written *me* instead of *I*. Occurrences of subjective forms as direct and indirect objects are somewhat harder to find, but they do occur.

Sir Winston's choice of *whom(soever)* where school grammars prescribe *who(soever)* is one that has been made by many other distinguished authors, despite H. W. Fowler's confident assertion that "good writers keep clear of it."<sup>15</sup> Other writers who have not kept clear of it include Chaucer, Caxton, Shakespeare, Walton, Goldsmith, Boswell, and—of more relevance for us because they are more recent—Shelley, Scott, Hawthorne, Kingsley, Darwin, Dickens, Hardy, Henry James, Galsworthy, and the great English scholar R. W. Chambers.<sup>16</sup> Sir Ernest Gowers supplies the names of such grammatical defectors as E. M. Forster, Lord David Cecil, W. Somerset Maugham, and the *Times* (London).<sup>17</sup> To these may be added the name of one of the most aristocratically elegant of all modern writers, Dame Edith Sitwell, who wrote in a letter of a ghost—no doubt an ancestral one—that brings "extreme misfortune to whomever sees it."<sup>18</sup> A mere observer of English speechways cannot be blamed for wondering about the rationale of the inflexible prescription of the school grammars in regard to *who* and *whom*.

Before leaving the *who/whom* dilemma, it is interesting to note that early English translators of the Bible attributed confusion to none other than the founder of Christianity Himself; in Matthew (xvi.13 and 15) both Tindale and the King James translators report Him as saying, "Whom do men saye

<sup>12</sup>Pyles, pp. 231–32, n. 34.

<sup>13</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup>"Washington Memo," Cowles Washington Bureau, Gainesville (Fla.) *Sun*, August 27, 1964, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>A *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (Oxford, 1940; first published 1926), p. 724. Fowler's reviser, Sir Ernest Gowers, more accurately inserts "usually" before "keep clear of it" (2nd ed., 1965, p. 708).

<sup>16</sup>Cited by Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar*, III, 57 and 198. The *OED* gives other examples.

<sup>17</sup>*Plain Words: Their ABC*, p. 228.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted by Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (New York, 1951), p. 262.

that I the sonne of man am?" and "But whom saye ye that I am?" But in 1881 the revisers of the Authorized Version (that is, the King James Bible), apparently under the influence of schoolroom grammar, changed the *whom* in both passages to the "orthodox" *who*.

Doubtless the reason unorthodox uses of *who* and *whom* and similarly proscribed constructions are not found more often in recently published books is that whenever they occur (it is to be suspected that they do indeed occur) in authors' manuscripts, they are almost invariably emended. Copy editors, regardless of their own feelings in the matter, are very conscious of the emotional impact of such constructions upon many readers, and it is likely that some of them sincerely believe that they have improved an author's text when they have made such emendations. Thus a misleading picture is given of the state of educated written English—assuming that most of those who write publishable books are to some degree educated. Future linguistic investigators, if they rely entirely upon the printed word to reconstruct the English of our day, will believe that there was far more uniformity in our usage than the schoolma'am, for all her potency, has ever actually been able to inculcate.

What has been said applies not only to current books; to some extent even our older literature has been made to conform to recent ideals of supposed correctness. We have already seen that the revisers of the Authorized Version corrected the grammar in that hallowed translation. Editors have been equally solicitous of Shakespeare's grammatical reputation by striking out the *-m* of *whom* in his "Giue vs particulars of thy preservation,/ How thou hast met vs heere, whom three howres since/ Were wrackt vpon this shore . . ." (*The Tempest* V.i.135–37), and adding *-m* to *who* wherever he used it in the objective function, as he did a good many times.<sup>19</sup> Alexander Pope and other later editors even went so far in their zeal for correct grammar as to change Macbeth's "And damn'd be him, that first cries hold, enough" (V.viii.34) to "And damn'd be he . . .," being better aware that "the verb *to be* can never take an object" than was our greatest poet. And, to go from the sublime to the inspired ridiculous, modern editions of W. S. Gilbert's librettos (for example, the Modern Library edition) change Sir William's well-established Victorian third person singular *don't's* to *doesn't's*. Upon hearing that by the Mikado's law the wife of an executed criminal is buried alive, the delectable Yum-Yum must now say, like any little twentieth-century maid from school, "It—it makes a difference, doesn't it?" The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company preserves the older grammatical tradition, but somewhat over-stresses the now unfashionable *don't's*, presumably for comic effect.

Prescriptivism certainly did not begin in the eighteenth century with the publication of Bishop Lowth's aforementioned *Short Introduction*. There must surely have been in all ages and in all times, even in the most primitive

<sup>19</sup>Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar*, VII, 242.



societies, those who have felt it to be their mission to purify the language of their fellows and, better yet, to exercise some sort of directive function, usually by attempting to inhibit any change. They can hardly be expected to do anything about those developments that occurred before their time, since they are as a rule quite unaware of linguistic history. But Robert Lowth was a man of tremendous prestige, a Hebrew scholar, professor of poetry at Oxford, Bishop of London—he might have been Archbishop of Canterbury had he chosen to accept the post—and he may fairly be considered for all practical purposes to be the progenitor of the contemporary tribe of highly dogmatic commentators on English usage. He had no predecessor of comparable influence.

By virtue of his family background, his education, and his high position in the church, Lowth might have been expected to take a somewhat cavalier attitude toward English usage, a matter for which those of such exalted status normally need have little concern. But concern for the well-being of the English language and fear of its eventual deterioration need not, and in Lowth's case did not, have any particularly political or sociological affinities. It is amusing to note that it took an almost entirely self-made man, William Cobbett, who could rarely have heard aristocratic speech in his early years, to question Lowth's omniscience. In his *Grammar of the English Language* (1818), Cobbett, who was even more dogmatic than Lowth himself, implied that the bishop was in fact somewhat lax. Lowth probably thought that he was writing primarily for English gentlemen like himself; Cobbett, who called himself Peter Porcupine, professedly wrote for "the Use of Soldiers, Sailors, Apprentices, and Plough-boys," much as our own American Noah Webster, who had nothing to do with the modern dictionaries bearing his name, had appealed to a character whom he called the American yeoman rather than to the polite part of American society, whose members he deemed too far gone in fast living ever to learn proper speech.

After Webster himself, it is likely that Lowth's most prestigious successor was another American, the expatriate Lindley Murray, who wrote a grammar for the edification of Quaker girls more or less cloistered in a "female seminary" in Yorkshire. His *Grammar of the English Language* (1795) was nonetheless a standard text for English and American males for the next fifty years. Apparently, to him that hath shall be given, for Murray was already a rich man when he wrote a book whose precepts were so much in demand that it went through fifty editions in its original form; a revision and an abridgment went through 120 more editions of 10,000 copies each.

Lowth frankly declared that his purpose was to show that the most distinguished writers of former times had been guilty of egregious solecisms and that the English language, "as it is spoken by the politest part of the nation," was in fact riddled with error. His followers have not let him down; to this day the great majority of literate English-speaking people believe (until they

are taxed with such a belief, when many of them begin to hedge) in an absolute standard of correctness promulgated from a linguistic Mount Sinai. Moreover, they are likely to assume that professional students of language ought to agree with them. Recognition of the existence of such an unwavering standard is very difficult for one who has examined the evidence; most students of usage are unwilling to concede that the variant practices of a great many distinguished speakers and writers are in effect sins against some inflexible English-speaking deity who had manifested Himself to certain especially gifted souls like Lowth, Cobbett, Murray, and Webster.

One might suppose that Standard English is that spoken and written by those whom we should expect to use Standard English—men and women in the public eye, excluding for the moment the mere “substantial citizens” cited by C. C. Fries as comprising businessmen and others “with occupations that are neither professional on the one hand nor strictly manual and unskilled on the other.”<sup>20</sup> If those who have by consensus written good books during the past century or so—a period during which, except for vocabulary items, English usage would not be expected to have changed a great deal—have not written Standard English, then there would seem to be something artificial and arbitrary about current notions regarding Standard English. The fact is that evidence presented by such works as the *OED* and Jespersen’s *Modern English Grammar* demonstrates that many eminent writers of the near past have transgressed against some of the rules of Standard English embalmed in textbooks and the like—rules that practically everybody believes in, including those who break them; for it is quite likely that if, for example, we could resurrect John Ruskin and tax him with having referred in his *Praeterita* to “anybody who cared to share their own commons [food] with me,”<sup>21</sup> he would himself say, under the influence of the school tradition, “Yes, that was indeed bad grammar; I ought to have written ‘his commons.’” Certainly nothing would have been lost in this particular instance if he had done so. It would, however, be disastrous to change the supposedly incorrect *them* to prescribed *him* in the following sentence by Gerald W. Johnson: “John Mason Brown loves everybody except McCarthy, which is the strength of his book; but not everybody except McCarthy is as lovable as he makes them, which is its weakness.”<sup>22</sup> This is not the place to discuss Johnson’s hazy reference of *which*; suffice it to say that it would not meet with approval in bona fide prescriptive circles, which would prescribe *a fact which*. Substi-

<sup>20</sup> *American English Grammar* (New York, 1940), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> The same construction occurs in his *Fors Clavigera* and *Time and Tide*. All these references are in Jespersen’s *Modern English Grammar*, II, 139, along with citations from other writers, including an American example from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*: “I wonder if anybody ever finds fault with anything I say. . . . I hope they do.”

<sup>22</sup> *New York Herald-Tribune Book Review*, April 29, 1956, p. 4.



tution of prescribed *he* and *him* would be equally infeasible in the following sentence by Mary McCarthy (no kin to the McCarthy unloved by John Mason Brown): “Nobody cared, apparently; nobody knew what they had missed; to them, it was just a silly seventh-grade play.”<sup>23</sup> In a syndicated newspaper column characteristically called “Watch Your English”—which is apparently what we all are expected to do all of the time—the following sentence is cited as containing an error in English: “Everybody I have talked to thinks the program was excellently planned; at least that’s what they told me.” The editor of the column, Carroll H. Jones, opines that “although the plural ‘they’ is commonly used in informal or conversational English [which this authority obviously believes to be an inferior variety] to refer to ‘everyone’ and ‘everybody,’ this is actually improper usage” and adds the injunction, “Use ‘he’ instead if you want your English to be above reproach.”<sup>24</sup> One wonders whether the game is worth the candle.

This particular rule—and the same could be said of a good many others equally hallowed in recent times—obviously has nothing to do with the usage of good writers, who have as often as not used the plural pronoun with reference to the indefinite pronouns *everybody* and the like. It is instead based upon an arbitrary appeal to logic and history (indefinite pronouns, such as *everybody* and *someone*, are historically singular and hence “ought to” be referred to by singular pronouns). If only the actual usage of literary people were involved, we should have perforce to admit that this particular use of *they*, *them*, or *their* as common-gender third person singular pronouns in reference to indefinite pronouns has been very common since the latter part of the sixteenth century. Many even earlier instances occur, for instance, Chaucer’s “And as hem aughte, arisen everichon” (*Troilus* II, 1598), in which both *hem* ‘them’ and the verb *arisen* are plural.

## Exercises

6. Which of the following expressions might a purist object to, and how might he rephrase them? Which seem wrong to you?
  1. The Rams have to somehow overcome the loss of their quarter-back.
  2. Here is the letter Pamela is waiting for.
  3. That’s me in the photo, the third from the right.
  4. It is time for you and I to take a vacation.
  5. He went about, giving help to whomever needed it.

<sup>23</sup>“C’est le Premier Pas qui Coûte,” *The New Yorker*, July 12, 1952, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, December 1, 1964, p. 18.

6. Fred only wanted to watch one game on television.
  7. I don't think he is going to get his wish.
  8. He graduated from barber college last fall.
  9. The players on the baseball team have no secrets between them.
  10. He is not as sure to win as he was last season.
7. Each of the following sentences contains an awkward or fussy expression that results from too great striving to be correct. Identify the "overcorrect" expressions and rewrite the sentences to make them more acceptable.
1. To whom did Mrs. Murphy send invitations to?
  2. Budgets should be on a monthly basis because some weekly expenses, as food, fluctuate.
  3. Some children don't think brushing teeth is important, but mothers who use Glint toothpaste know differently.
  4. Everybody had left before the fire started, and it was lucky that he did.
  5. Henry certainly caught the 8:30 train if it were on time.
8. The following sentences contain expressions that are nonstandard. Rewrite each sentence to make it acceptable.
1. The world is full of people that you like the way they look.
  2. He flouted his straight-A record with the intention of flaunting his fraternity brothers.
  3. She specializes in dressing provocatively, acting helpless, attracting men, and etc.
  4. Amy Mixon, the aging witch on the television program "Enchantment" and who really isn't very witchlike in real life, is one of TV's most talented actresses.
  5. I think that if everyone looked up his facts before he started giving opinions that there would be fewer wrong opinions given.
9. There are a number of usage guides that attempt to describe the status of disputed matters of language. Some useful ones are H. W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, 2nd ed. rev. and ed. by Sir Ernest Gowers; Margaret Nicholson's *Dictionary of American-English Usage*; Bergen and Cornelia Evans's *Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage*; Porter G. Perrin's *Writer's Guide and Index to English*, 4th ed. rev. by Karl W. Dykema and Wilma R. Ebbitt; Margaret M. Bryant's *Current American Usage*; and William W. Watt's *Short Guide to English Usage*.

Choose one of the following controversial expressions; look it up

in several of the above mentioned guides or in similar books; and write a paper in which you describe the status of the expression you have chosen. Report whether the books that you consulted agree or disagree.

1. I don't know *if/whether* Mandrake will come for supper or not.
2. In his letter to us, Roderick *inferred/implied* he was going to Europe.
3. It is *us/we* who have to solve these problems.
4. He walked into the dentist's office *like/as* a trooper marches to battle.
5. Millicent was *anxious/eager* to spend her spring vacation in Nassau.
6. *Can/May* I carry that box upstairs for you?
7. Lily is so *disinterested/uninterested* in politics that she doesn't even vote.
8. *Due to/Because of* the rain, the protest march will be canceled.
9. This summer *less/fewer* students came to school than last year.
10. The condemned man decided that he would rather be *hung/hanged* than electrocuted.
11. I'm next in line, *aren't I/am I not?*
12. *Who/Whom* do the police suspect of the crime?
13. *Grammarwise/In grammar* we have seen many changes in recent years.
14. We didn't see Rumplemeyer because he was *laying/lying* on the floor.
15. Lulu has *plenty/plenty of* time to do her act.
16. Philbert is the one *we looked for/for whom we looked*.
17. The Administration was *pretty/fairly* sure they could answer the demonstrators.
18. He *had better/ought to* start working on his term paper.
19. The reason the understudy got the part is *because/that* she is the director's niece.
20. The judges gave the silver and blue ribbons to Smith and Jones *respectfully/respectively*.
21. I *will/shall* probably see you before tomorrow.
22. The automotive industry promises *to increasingly/increasingly* to dominate the economic life of the nation.
23. If the test *was/were* on Monday instead, there would be more time to study for it.
24. If people got to know *each other/one another* better, there would be less prejudice.
25. Morton is wearing a Russian *type/type of* hat.

## U AND NON-U USAGE

All that we have said thus far about the aristocratic tradition in speech has concerned a world that the highly cultivated—frequently in contrast to those who are merely erudite—would like to preserve out of nostalgia for the “good old days.” But it is probably only a matter of time until such persons, if they are still alive, will be considered reactionaries for their refusal to believe that there is an open road to culture and breeding, which all may tread who make the effort to do so. It seems inevitable that in the world of the future—the classless society envisaged by politicians and idealists—gentlefolk will carry very little weight, if indeed their traditions survive at all. Tremendous changes in attitudes toward life, of which language is a part, have occurred recently and rapidly, and all Americans must be more or less aware of them.

Moreover, though she may lag behind her somewhat overripe daughter in such details as plumbing, power politics, and astronautics, similar changes are observable in the Mother Country, where able and altogether worthy men of working-class and petit-bourgeois origins have for a long time been making their marks in the arts and sciences, as well as in politics, even though they might not have been invited to Cliveden in Lady Astor’s day. For social status, aside from everything else, Oxford and Cambridge (they are sometimes blended into *Oxbridge*) are still best; nevertheless, many an angry young man with a provincial accent and a red-brick university training has come down from the unfashionable northern counties and achieved distinction of one sort or another in the capital. The fashionable speech of Oxbridge and the great public schools (public in the British sense, that is, exclusive and expensive endowed schools, like Eton, Harrow, and Rugby) is sometimes beyond their linguistic capacities. Many such young men, however, have no desire—at least not at first—to attain to it, disliking as much as do many Americans what H. L. Mencken once referred to as its “pansy cast.” A certain brilliant young actor, trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, is perfectly able to speak the speech of Oxbridge when his role requires it, but assertively maintains his native Yorkshire speech in private life. A cynical prediction is that he will change his ways if and when a knighthood is in the offing for him.

Henceforth the convenient abbreviations of A. S. C. Ross, **U** and **non-U**, will be used with reference to both British and American usage and with gratitude to Professor Ross for having provided them. As defined above, **U** means simply ‘upper-class,’ and the terms are used, as Ross uses them, “factually and not in reprobation.” They have appeared often in the news since the publication of Nancy Mitford’s *Noblesse Oblige* in 1956 (scholars were aware of them a few years earlier) and are generally understood as they apply to British usage. It is difficult, not to say impossible, to find equivalent terms

that will at the same time be inoffensive in their connotations for all people. Perhaps "old-fashioned elite" or "old-fashioned cultivated" would come closest to describing the American equivalent of Ross's U for a type or style of speech that doubtless exists in all societies, even those that pride themselves upon their classlessness. It should be stressed that we do not here regard U as per se superior or worthy of emulation, any more than we regard non-U as contemptible. As observers and recorders of usage, we are interested in both varieties simply because they exist.

Broadly speaking, non-U may include **nonstandard** in the sense in which *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* uses the term, that is, to designate locutions of such frequent occurrence within the context of standard speech that *substandard* would be a pejoration of their status. **Substandard** is more appropriately applied to such constructions as *I seen* and *I have went*. **Irregardless**, a blend of *regardless* and *irrespective*, is a classic example of a nonstandard form that is also non-U; it is sometimes used by rather well-educated people who have little sense of style, and no great harm is done to the language nor to human society. But non-U is not usually substandard or non-standard at all; it is not even middlebrow, since examples occur in the speech of those who have very lofty brows indeed; but it is invariably characteristic of middle-class rather than U usage. The term non-U may designate nothing more opprobrious than a turn of speech or a pronunciation that is most unlikely to occur in the usage of those who are traditionally regarded as "persons of breeding," like *Pardon me!* for *I beg your pardon, I'm sorry*, or *Excuse me*. It would be difficult to say what is nonstandard or, for that matter, "ungrammatical" about *Pardon me!* but those with U-perception feel it is definitely non-U. A single example of non-U pronunciation will suffice at this time: *dissect*, with its first syllable as *die* (by analogy with *bisect*, perhaps), a naïve pronunciation used not by illiterates and semiliterates, who have no occasion to use the word at all, but by a good many scientists of considerable eminence. This pronunciation of *dissect* must thus be regarded as standard but non-U.

The fact is that non-U forms occur not only in the usage of ordinary solid citizens but also in the usage of some who have earned considerable distinction in contemporary life. It must be borne in mind that the world is full of perfectly acceptable people who are not in the least concerned with elegance, style, or any other esthetic linguistic qualities. A few among them—the ordinary solid citizens, the prosperous industrialists, the scientists of one sort or another, the holders of high public office, and the members of what are traditionally called the learned professions—may be much concerned with "correctness" as they conceive of it. As a rule, this concern is directed toward the avoidance of certain constructions—seldom more than a very few—that they fancy to be "incorrect": "misplaced" *only*, terminal prepositions, split infinitives, and the like, which they may themselves avoid or think they avoid, but which in any event they certainly disapprove of.



A lack of complete understanding of what they have learned in school and college sometimes lures them into hypercorrectness—a leaning over backward that is very non-U indeed. They know, for instance, that one “oughtn’t” to say that a particular cigarette tastes “like a cigarette should” and suppose that the advertising slogan in question indicates a downhill trend in the English language. Consequently, they may proceed to substitute *as* for *like* under circumstances in which *like* has never been condemned by school grammar, as in the following sentence from the advertisement of a steamship company, which appeared on the back cover of the *Saturday Review* for January 21, 1967: “Grace Line gives you these [the bare essentials of travel] just as any other cruise,” going on to point out that it adds “a legendary elegance” as well.

Although today there is nothing in American English exactly comparable to British U-speech, there used to be—for example, the speech of Boston Brahmins and that of the landed southern tidewater gentry. And there are still vestiges of criteria setting off an American U-speaker from the man who has merely had approximately sixteen years of schooling; for U-speech is not really a matter of schooling at all, but rather of what was once referred to vaguely, in an era less imbued with idealistic equalitarianism than ours, as a “good background.”

There is, for instance, the matter of word choice, frequently a class-designator, as Vance Packard points out in *The Status Seekers*.<sup>25</sup> Even here, however, standards can shift so that one generation’s non-U may be the next generation’s U. An American of “good background” born around the middle of the nineteenth century, for instance, put on his *pantaloons* as a necessary stage in preparing himself for public view; to his son, the same appurtenances were *trousers*; to his grandson, *pants*. In 1904 the *OED* called *pants* “a vulgar abbreviation of *Pantaloons* (chiefly U.S.).” It is no longer vulgar, though it may be sexually ambiguous. In reference to men’s garments, Vance Packard is almost certainly correct, assuming that he is referring to men under fifty or so, in saying that “as you move from the upper class to those somewhat below . . . pants become trousers” (p. 141).

In general, it may be said that the U-usage of *any* language is blunter, more earthy, more spade-calling than non-U. In this respect, as in a good many others, it is closer to substandard speech than to middle-class speech; as Lord Melbourne put it, “the middle classes are all affectation and conceit and pretense and concealment” (cited by Packard, *loc. cit.*). Usually the non-U term for something that non-U speakers deem improper has a pretentiousness, a pseudo-refinement, a mealy-mouthed quality about it: the U-speaker, for instance, is likely to refer to false teeth simply as *false teeth*, a plain term, which is shocking to the non-U speaker, who calls them *dentures*, following the supposedly more scientific and elevated usage of the man who makes them. The U-speaker takes medicine when he is sick; the non-U speaker has

<sup>25</sup>New York, 1959, pp. 140–41.

*medication* when he is ill. If the medication proves ineffectual, the non-U speaker may have to resort to having *surgery*; the U-speaker is merely operated on, or has an operation. In other words, the non-U speaker is impressed by, and addicted to, the sort of euphemistic elegance displayed by the successful writer of advertising copy, who must be well aware of the tastes of those for whom he is writing and who thus has given us such terms as *bathroom bowl*, *message* 'sales talk or inspirational sermon,' and *perspiration odor*, all of which the U-speaker scoffs at as "affectation and conceit and pretense and concealment," though it must be admitted that a tendency toward the frankness of U-speech may be discerned in *bad breath*, which seems to have displaced the more euphemistic and hifalutin *halitosis*.

Similarly, the U-speaker is likely to avoid the circumlocutory pomposity and the glossy flipness of many neologisms, although it must be stressed that it may take little more than a generation for these to become unquestionably U. To him American customs and standards of living are just American life, not *the American way of life*, which he is likely to consider a pompous and tasteless phrase; an elderly person is not a *senior citizen*; behavior is merely behavior and not a *behavior pattern*; a drunkard is a drunkard and not anything so imbued with "human dignity" as a *compulsive drinker* with a *drinking problem*; and one who has lost his mind is simply insane, or even crazy, but not, except ironically, *mentally ill*—a further illustration of his tendency to use blunt, plain speech. He investigates problems thoroughly rather than *in depth* and prefers to explain rather than to *spell out*. If he is very U indeed, he may consider it pompous and tasteless to confer the title *Mrs.* plus his own surname upon his wife in introducing her or making reference to her, even in the most formal circumstances, and she, if equally U, would never refer to him as anything but "my husband," or, to friends and acquaintances, by his first name. Furthermore, the U-speaker is likely to eschew *so* as a simple adverb of degree, as in *Thank you so much*, and *too* in the same function, as in *The talk wasn't too good*. There is nothing nonstandard about *perspire* for *sweat*, *pass away* for *die*, *powder room* for *toilet* (itself earlier a euphemism), *breakthrough* for *development*, and *finalize* for *complete*. But all are regarded by many persons of taste as non-U; all are, or were in the beginning, characterized by pretension, subterfuge, vanity, or some other quality generally regarded among U-speakers as mildly amusing or even somewhat reprehensible. But there is nothing inherently wrong with them; they merely indicate characteristics of those who use them, characteristics that the U-speaker finds it difficult to admire. Such locutions are essentially middle-class, having begun as affectations of up-to-dateness, culture, refinement, or any combination of these.

But distinctions like these can be obliterated in a generation, or so we are told, and we may shortly have a classless as well as a regionless form of American English, which will be held up as a norm for all speakers. This



at least is the ideal of many progressive thinkers, and one must admit that it is truly democratic. It is only to be hoped that all will consent to play the game. In any case, the standard will doubtless be the usage of the mass media, which is, as we should expect, based on middle-class usage—the non-U of the majority of those whom we think of as substantial citizens. Such a standard should be comparatively easy for any ambitious person to master; it is, in fact, essentially the schoolroom English of our own day. The fact that it is often lifeless, dry, dull, insipid, and colorless is irrelevant; anyone noting such characteristics would be straightway regarded as subversive. The fact is that even now anyone noting them is so regarded.

The same principles hold, as we have implied, for pronunciation, even in American English, where pronunciation is much less important as a caste-designator than “correct grammar.” To pronounce *congratulation* to rhyme with *adulation* and the last syllable of *processes* as *ease*, as if *process* were a third declension Latin noun like *basis*, *crisis*, and *analysis*,<sup>26</sup> certainly seems newfangled and hence non-U to older-generation cultured speakers. But in our day such pronunciations can hardly be considered nonstandard; these and other pronunciations that might, but will not, be cited here are extremely frequent in the speech of newscasters, commentators, and those who extol the virtues of the stretchable brassiere (always referred to as a *bra*), washing machines, refrigerators, mouthwashes, deodorants, and various other products that we like to think helped make America great. Those who use these pronunciations are invariably fastidiously dressed, expertly barbered (or coiffured) professional public speakers—persons of some consequence to those who regard advertising, salesmanship, and news commentary as important aspects of contemporary American culture. According to any enlightened definition of Standard English, the usage of such awe-inspiring persons must be regarded as standard, even though certain pronunciations, along with frequent preciosity and overpreciseness—giving to each and every syllable its just dues—may make the U-speaker wince a little. Of course, he doesn’t really care enough about the whole business to worry very much—not if he is really U and hence indisposed to prescribe the usage of others.

As for truly substandard usage, it is assumed that readers of this book have no need to be told that, if they want to climb to the top of the tree, they should not use such forms as *he come*, *you was*, *I seen*, *have went*, *hissself*, double negatives, or other locutions now confined to uneducated usage, though, as we have seen, not all of them have always been so confined. This, however, is not the place for a detailed discussion of substandard English.

In the superdemocratic world of the future envisaged by our national leaders—a world in which everybody will presumably be invited to everybody

<sup>26</sup>For a few other examples of spurious third declension Latin plurals, see John Algeo, “More False Latin,” *American Speech*, XLI (1966), 72–74.

else's parties—what standard is to be inculcated in the schools? We have already suggested the feasibility of a norm based upon the speech of the mass media, even though any such norm is likely to be regarded with complete indifference by U-speakers, if indeed there are any of these around by then. American U-speech is mainly current, as Clifton Fadiman points out, in a few large eastern cities and their environs—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, Charleston, and perhaps San Francisco and New Orleans as well.<sup>27</sup> It would be clearly undemocratic, as well as ill-advised, to attempt to impose a type of speech with such geographical and social limitations on the rest of the country, even if it were in the least possible to do so. For one thing, its lack of bourgeois namby-pamby and of the combination of flamboyance and self-conscious “folksiness” beloved of bureaucrats, ghost-writers, advertising copywriters, and others important in “the American way of life,” its niceties, and its inconsistencies (apparent or real) would be completely beyond the capacities of those with no understanding or appreciation of such characteristics. Not even the schoolma'am could master the intricacies, subtleties, and inconsistencies of U-speech, even if she could learn to like them. And there would seem to be little point in trying.

Obviously the acquisition of U-speech would be as difficult for Americans who lack it by tradition—assuming that they had any concern with acquiring it—as A. S. C. Ross declares it to be for his countrymen. To the question “Can a non-U speaker become a U-speaker?” Ross's answer is that an adult can never do so altogether successfully (Nancy Mitford, ed., *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 33), going on to say that “one single pronunciation, word, or phrase will suffice to brand an apparent U-speaker as originally non-U (for U-speakers themselves never make ‘mistakes’).”

For pedagogical reasons, then, U-speech is definitely out of the question, for it reflects, in addition to its complexities, the devil-may-care attitude toward languages of a hereditary aristocracy, our “old families”—an attitude also frequently found in the literature of the past even when, as was often the case, this literature was created by brilliant sons of the lower and middle classes. The ideal, it may be inferred from the often expressed linguistic opinions of educated laymen (who are usually very vociferous in expressing the need for “improvement” of the English language—they are convinced that it is going steadily to the dogs), would be some form of speech with rigidly codified, easily learned rules, the mastery of which would enable all to speak

<sup>27</sup> His “On the Utility of U-Talk” appeared in *Holiday* magazine and is reprinted in *The World of Words*, ed. Barnet Kottler and Martin Light (Boston, 1967), pp. 179–87. The equating of linguistics with Popular Frontism in Fadiman's closing paragraphs is erroneous, as is the assumption that the U-speaker is much concerned with “correct usage” in any schoolroom sense of the term. The aristocrat, whether English or American, is likely to take a cavalier attitude toward many of the schoolroom prescriptions and, as we have seen above, to talk and write pretty much as he pleases.

equally well. This would amount to essentially the same blending of logic, reason, and analogy that has proved so satisfactory to these laymen in the near past and that has always been the stock in trade of the school grammars. After all, one does not need more than a very few furrows in one's brain to learn to say "the reason is that" rather than "the reason is because." It is simply a matter of a little drill, a process that requires no thinking whatever. When one is tempted to use the hitherto idiomatic but recently proscribed *the reason is because*, one merely pulls oneself up before *because* and substitutes *that*—nothing easier. It is similar with most of the prescriptions.

The worrisome question remains: Are writers and speakers of any real consequence going to conform, or are they going to continue to let schoolroom grammar down, as they have done in the past? If one has something really important or exciting to say—and many worthy people have not, alas—one is likely to say it or write it as he pleases, without consulting "authorities" who might presume to tell him how he ought to use his own, his native tongue.

To take a single specific example pertaining to pronunciation—should young persons living in those parts of the Atlantic coast where the sound symbolized by *r* in such words as *far* and *farm* is lost be drilled to pronounce the *r* sound as it is pronounced by an overwhelming majority of American speakers? (It should be remarked that they had better be so trained if they aspire to be radio or television commentators or salesmen unless, with white goatees and string ties, they choose to specialize in hymning the merits of ready-prepared fried chicken, hominy grits, or corn pone.) But the fact remains that "*r*-less" speech in certain areas is traditionally more aristocratic than "*r*-full" speech; Raven I. McDavid, Jr., has demonstrated this fact very strikingly in his "Postvocalic /-r/ in South Carolina," a study of the social distribution of the consonant in question in his native state, where it is pronounced "in culturally peripheral communities, generally on poor land among people who were driven onto that land—or, as textile workers, into their occupation—by the pressure of competition from the plantation system and by Negro labor."<sup>28</sup> The "*r*-less" plantation caste in the South was predominately of English descent; the population of the up-country, which retained the sound in question, was almost entirely made up of Ulster Scots—the so-called Scotch-Irish—and Germans. A similar social distribution occurs in practically all of our Atlantic coastal cities; Philadelphia, which has "*r*-full" speech on all levels, is the outstanding exception. The question of what to do about those cultivated speakers who snobbishly and undemocratically lose their *r*'s must be left to those who are both wiser and more imbued with social consciousness than are most linguists. However, it is unlikely that without the threat of a firing squad at death they will reject their "*r*-less" linguistic and social heritage for the sake of what may be deemed the Larger Good.

<sup>28</sup>*American Speech*, XXIII (1948), 203.

## Exercises

10. In each of the following sets, one group of words has been reported as U-usage and the other as non-U, though standard. In each set determine which group is U and which non-U.
  1. (a) prep school, teacher, grade 12  
(b) boarding school, master, form 6
  2. (a) sofa, library, bedroom furniture  
(b) divan, den, bedroom suite (pronounced like *suit*)
  3. (a) tuxedo, formal gown, lingerie  
(b) dinner jacket, long dress, underwear
  4. (a) pleased to meet you, the wife, company  
(b) hello, my wife, friends
  5. (a) inexpensive, wealthy, help  
(b) cheap, rich, servants
11. One of the characteristics of standard but non-U speech is that it contains euphemisms. Rephrase the following sentences to make them more euphemistic or less direct.
  1. Richard has a job with the city.
  2. Hubert is studying to be a teacher.
  3. Lucy is buying some underwear.
  4. The Johnsons have finished their plans for a new house.
  5. Some old people objected to the high doctors' fees.
12. Read Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* (New York: D. McKay Company, 1959) and compare the class distinctions he describes with the U/non-U and standard/nonstandard/substandard distinctions taken up in this chapter.
13. Write an essay in which you agree or disagree with the following statement and support your position with evidence from your own observations:

The anxiety of the middle classes about the 'correctness' of their speech habits is parallel to many other middle-class anxieties . . . . To the middle-class person, the prototype of correct speech is to be found in dictionaries and textbooks, or perhaps in books on etiquette or public speaking. He alone is preoccupied with the correctness of his own expression. The upper-class person may be anxious about whether or not he is being understood, but he is rarely insecure about the correctness of his

phraseology or his diction. As with his attitudes toward many other phenomena, the lower-class person is also concerned entirely with the functional aspects of language. If he makes himself understood, his speech has served its function.

Thomas E. Lasswell, *Class and Stratum*

## LEVELS AND STYLES OF USAGE

It should be implicit in the foregoing discussion of usage that, as John S. Kenyon pointed out in an important article entitled "Cultural Levels and Functional Varieties of English,"<sup>29</sup> terms like *formal*, *colloquial* (or *informal*), and *slang* do not designate levels of speech at all; they have no relevance to *standard*, *nonstandard*, and *substandard*. Rather, as we shall see, they designate functional varieties, or styles, that occur on every conceivable cultural and social level. It is surprising that they were ever regarded as constituting a sort of hierarchy of usage, with formal at the top and slang at the bottom, but many otherwise well-informed people have in fact so regarded them—to such an extent that *Webster's Third* has had to come around to defining **colloquialism** as "belonging to local or regional dialect," with the important proviso that it is not used technically in this sense.

The adjective **colloquial** seems not to have suffered the same fate as the noun *colloquialism*, and we may still without ambiguity speak of **standard colloquial**, that is, the easy-going, self-assured, informal speech of a gentleman when he is not making a public address, and even in his most formal platform speech there will inevitably be long stretches that do not differ in the least from those of his informal speech. For instance, the speech of a cultivated Anglican clergyman in sociable conversation with his parishioners will differ slightly, but only slightly nowadays, from his somewhat more formal pulpit style. It should be noted, however, that even sermons, like presumably less elevated forms of public address, are more and more often characterized by informality than they used to be; it is likely that the great American spellbinder Henry Ward Beecher (b. 1813) was far more formal in his pulpit than the present Archbishop of Canterbury (b. 1904). Nowadays one is far more likely to hear formal, if decidedly non-U, speech from badly educated backwoods preachers of the evangelical persuasion than from the considerably more cultured pastors of metropolitan parishes whose congregations are by and large not of working-class origins.

In general, the ordinary, verbally unsophisticated man is altogether likely to use what he conceives of as formal speech when he supposes that the dignity

<sup>29</sup> *College English*, X (1948), 31-36.



of the occasion demands it. Such formal speech may be quite substandard in its word choice, its pronunciations of learned words, its morphology, and its syntax; malapropisms may occur, and the speaker may lean over backward in his zeal for what he thinks of as correct. But formality is really more a matter of tone and style than of anything else; he and his hearers imagine that a certain style is formal, and there can be no doubt that the style in question varies considerably from his everyday speech within the bosom of his family (who doubtless would be referred to from the pulpit as his "loved ones").

**Formal**, then, obviously does not designate a cultural level; furthermore, it is unlikely that anyone would admit to ever having seriously believed that formal speech is that of the educated and informal that of the uneducated. Nevertheless, as Kenyon points out, many writers on language have in fact confused cultural levels with styles—or, to use his terminology, with varieties that occur on all cultural levels. The Kenyon article has been a valuable corrective. Nevertheless, the *Washington Post* of January 17, 1962, lambasted *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* for including "colloquialisms, slovenly diction, bad grammar, and barbarisms of all sorts." This inclusion of colloquialisms with the other categories presumably deplored by all of us (that is, slovenly diction, bad grammar, and barbarisms) implies that informal speech is invariably low, no matter on what cultural level it may occur. In commenting upon the same work the *Richmond News Leader* declared (January 3, 1962), untruthfully as far as the first adjective is concerned, that "nothing in the new Webster's is 'substandard' or 'colloquial.'"<sup>30</sup> Such a judgment clearly indicates disapproval of both uneducated speech like *If he had came when he said he come, he wouldn't have saw what he said he seen* and all colloquial speech, like *it's*, *you* used indefinitely, and *goshdarn*—all forms occurring in the following quotation: "It's quite extraordinary how in a short time you can overthrow some of the bigotry and hypocrisy and goshdarn foolishness which has overlaid Anglicanism"—not to mention *has* where the purist might prescribe *have*. The speaker—His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, as quoted by Yousuf Karsh in the *Saturday Review* of April 29, 1967, p. 57.

Similarly, **slang** designates not a cultural level, but a stylistic variety occurring on all cultural levels. But judging from the horror with which it is regarded by the purists (who frequently use it unwittingly themselves), one would suppose that its use is confined to the lowest group in the cultural scale. But there is nothing low about *exam*, *lab*, *bike*, *to come a cropper*, *to pull a boner*, *O.K.*, and a good many other slang terms that are quite U; it might be maintained that some of these are colloquial rather than slang, for it is of course frequently difficult to draw the line.

<sup>30</sup>This and the preceding citation are reprinted in the anthology edited by Sledd and Ebbitt previously cited in footnote 5.

Therefore, we must at least recognize the existence of a number of varieties or styles—*formal*, *informal* or *colloquial*, and *slang* are sufficient for present purposes—that are by no means mutually exclusive. Thus, what one cultivated speaker regards as slang may be merely part of the informal, or colloquial, style of an equally cultivated speaker; and it is the same with the distinction between formal and informal styles. As we have indicated, there is bound to be considerable overlapping, and no “authority” is really competent to draw hard and fast lines. He can merely pontificate on the basis of his own current prejudices.

### Exercises

14. The following sentences are stiltedly formal. Rewrite to make them easier and more colloquial.
  1. They sought a resolution to the predicament created by their impecuniosity.
  2. Herman affirmed that he would dispatch a donation to the indigents.
  3. Having donned the garments she had purchased during the forenoon, Alison departed to seek recreation.
  4. The comestibles having been consumed, the voyagers proceeded on their journey.
  5. We extend felicitations to that troop of valiant warriors who sustained debilitating losses on the field of battle.
15. Suggest some slang equivalents for each of the following terms:
 

|                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. intoxicated             | 6. money                 |
| 2. arrested                | 7. the police            |
| 3. excellent, good         | 8. a mistake             |
| 4. a girl                  | 9. a party               |
| 5. an objectionable person | 10. an argument or fight |
16. Make a collection of currently popular slang terms and write a definition for each.

### A LAST WORD

From this somewhat detailed discussion of usage certain facts should have emerged. It might be well to summarize here, in order that they may receive the stress that they merit: (1) usage is relative in the sense that the good usage of one period may be the bad usage of the next, and vice versa; (2)



what is regarded as bad usage is not necessarily bad English, but frequently only archaic English; (3) the grammar of simple folk is not un-English or to be judged as "bad" but is merely unfashionable at the present time; (4) there is an elite usage, based largely upon such outmoded factors as tradition and taste, which may for certain groups supersede and transcend what is merely democratic "good" usage; (5) the "good" usage of a given period is that of persons of consequence in that period, the "prestige dialect" as a rule being that of persons who would have acquired prestige even if they spoke in some other way; (6) average people—the assumed salt of democratic society—feel a need for linguistic authority, which can be filled by the schools better, and certainly more easily, than by anything more sophisticated that they might yearn after; and (7) the schools, always a potent influence in American life, would do best by going along with the times in which we live, which bode little good for U-speakers, that is, those whose usage is traditional and aristocratic.

One last word: one would suppose that the gifted man with something of significance to say would not care about what someone less gifted than he arbitrarily, and often in the face of actual usage, has decreed to be the "proper" choice between pairs of words (*will* and *shall*, *can* and *may*, *between* and *among*, and the like) and constructions (*everybody . . . they* and *everybody . . . he*, *can't hardly* and *can hardly*, *none are* and *none is*, and the like) that mean exactly the same thing. But the fact is that, unless he has the somewhat arrogant confidence in the usage of his social class that a genuine U-speaker has, his teaching in school will have instilled in him ill-digested notions of all sorts and conditions about "proper" choices.

The chances are that his speaking and writing will not suffer from making such choices, and it is certain that doing so will give him a greater feeling of security regarding the future of the English language. Unfortunately for the happiness of all, it is likely, unless someone puts a stop to it, that the detection of lapses by distinguished speakers and writers from a favored arbitrary standard will continue to furnish linguists with, as one literary scholar has put it, "the pervading fun in catching the cultivated with their language down"<sup>31</sup>—referring presumably to the "game" played by the scholarly editors of the *OED* and a good many other supposed fun-loving English, American, and Continental scholars who in their laboriously culled specimens of English usage have furnished us with magnificent records of what is frequently, in the view of most nonprofessional commentators, a misbehaving and recalcitrant English language.

Game or no game, the proper study of language would seem to be the study of what people speak and write. The assumption that they ought to speak and write otherwise—according to a tight but easily learned little set

<sup>31</sup>Sheridan Baker, "The Error of *Ain't*," *College English*, XXVI (1964), 93.

of rules hallowed by no very ancient nor even honorable tradition—will be difficult for scholarly observers of usage to accept. But it might be argued that for the sake of the Larger Good—conceived of as a great democratic society in which everyone willing to make a little effort may be linguistically, socially, and economically secure—it ought to be accepted. A culture based on proper choices between synonyms is far easier to attain, and hence more truly democratic, than the kind of elegance and intellectual sophistication that in an older tradition were characteristic of the real thing.

### Exercise

17. Considering what you have read in this chapter, why should you find it necessary to distrust any simple two-valued approach to the question of usage in language?

# 3

## SPEECH AND WRITING

Because the linguist insists that speech is primary and writing secondary to and derivative from it, it is often supposed that he must be a coarse fellow with no concern for literature nor any interest in writing.<sup>1</sup> Nothing could really be farther from the truth.

Nevertheless, compared with writing, speech is immeasurably ancient; it is likely that man has been speaking very much as we speak, though not of course about the same things, for the better part of a million years. How it all began we have no way of knowing. But with the acquisition of language man became human; he alone of all animals evinced the marvelous capacity to invent a complex system of oral noises to symbolize the phenomena of life as he knew it. No human being, no matter how low in the cultural and technological scale, lacks this capacity. No other animal, not even the charming, highly intelligent porpoise, seems to possess it. Tarzan's mastery of a language of the apes belongs strictly to the realm of fiction.

The dance of the bee when she returns to the hive after finding a source of nectar, the warning calls emitted by the gibbon, the mating dance of the unforgettably named three-spined stickleback are communicative, as Charles F. Hockett points out;<sup>2</sup> but they are not language. Hockett lists seven impor-

<sup>1</sup>For instance, Wilson Follett in *Modern American Usage* (New York, 1966) declares that "Present-day linguistic theory writes off the written, saying it is not language; only speech is language" (p. 11).

<sup>2</sup>*A Course in Modern Linguistics* (New York, 1958), pp. 570-80.

tant characteristics of all language that do not recur as a group in any nonhuman system of communication. One of these is a system of meaningful sounds and meaningful forms—that is, of **phonemes** and **morphemes**; another is the ability to transmit information of one sort or another from generation to generation. Some birds and animals can be taught, laboriously no doubt, to articulate recognizable speech sounds, for which they have quite adequate physical equipment; but they are totally unable to pass on what they have learned to their offspring. Chimpanzees can likewise be taught to eat in a mannerly fashion with knives, forks, and spoons; there is, however, no evidence that they have ever taught their progeny to do so. To argue that they have not done so merely because they see no point in such human fripperies is to credit these altogether prepossessing beasts with a sophistication that in fact they utterly lack. They can also be taught to use tools that would be far more useful to them than eating utensils, but only man has passed down from generation to generation instruction, which until a comparatively short while ago was purely oral, regarding the making and use of such tools as stone hammers and axes or bows and arrows.

Man has been passing on such information and instruction, the archeologists tell us, for hundreds of thousands of years; the very existence of prehistoric artifacts presupposes language. It took him a long, long time to learn a means of representing, by marks made in one way or another in or on stone, wood, metal, leather, clay, parchment, paper, or some other surface, the noises that for millennia he had made with his mouth for the purpose of communication. For writing, as compared with speech, is a mere Johnny-come-lately, no more than about five thousand years old. Recognition of the import of this fact is not to denigrate writing.

The development of writing will be briefly considered later, after we have taken up the aforementioned vocal noises, the systematic use of which is certainly man's most brilliant accomplishment, just as their representation by marks is his second most brilliant. Fortunately, the beginnings of writing are so recent, comparatively speaking, that they can be traced fairly clearly. These beginnings demarcate prehistory from history.

We may define language as systematized sequences of vocal sounds that carry meaning to all members of a given cultural group. In such an utterance as, for instance, *He's going off the deep end*—the precise meaning of which depends upon factors other than the vowel and consonant sounds, as we shall see later—there are seventeen single sounds arranged in various sequences. Four of these—the final sounds of *going* and *off*, the initial sound of *the*, and the middle sound of *deep*—are written with two symbols each; thus, twenty-one letters are required to write these seventeen single sounds. The sound written *e* in *he's* is repeated in *deep* (but is not the same as that written *e* in *the*, unless one chooses to read the utterance as a small schoolboy might do from his primer), and the sound represented by *d* also occurs twice; there

are thus only fifteen different sounds in the utterance. The sounds represented by *h*, *s*, *g*, *ng*, *ff*, *d*, *p*, and *n* are called **consonants** because they go with **sonants**, or **vowels**, to form syllables.

## DISTINCTIVE SOUNDS

All the sounds discussed thus far are distinctive sounds in that no others could be substituted for them in the words in which they occur. The *h* of *he's*, for instance, distinguishes this form from *bees*, *keys*, *leas*, *knees*, *peas*, *she's*, *teas*, and *these*, all of which are otherwise identical—just as *he's*, *hose*, and *haze* are identical except for their medial distinctive sounds, and as *he's*, *heal*, *heap*, and *heat* are identical except for their final distinctive sounds. Similarly, all the other sounds in the cited sentence are distinctive sounds.

Such distinctive sounds are called **phonemes**. There are of course many more speech sounds, or phones, than there are phonemes. A phoneme is thus a group of similar sounds, called **allophones**, thought of by the speakers of a given language as the “same sound.” In English, the /r/ phoneme—henceforth phonemes will be thus written within virgules, or slashes—occurs in *rot*, *tree*, and *three*. Now all these “*r* sounds,” though similar phonetically are really somewhat different from one another. That in *rot* is the **voiced retroflex** (‘bent-back’) *r*, referring to the position assumed by the tongue in articulating it and to the fact that the so-called vocal cords—not really cords, but more like flaps or lips—vibrate. In *tree* the articulation is similar, except that there is no vibration, or **voicing**, at least not at the beginning of the articulation. In *three* there is a trill, or single tongue-flap.

Phoneticians, who are interested in all possible variations of sound, indicate these slight differences in their transcriptions, which they enclose within square brackets—thus [r] for the sound in *rot*, [ɾ] for that in *tree*, and [r̥] for that in *three*. Phonemicians, who are interested primarily in distinctive sounds, regard these (along with a few other varieties of the *r* sound) as allophones of a single /r/ phoneme. The variations are conditioned by neighboring sounds and thus said to be in complementary distribution; the voiceless or partially voiceless [ɾ], for instance, occurs after /p/, /t/, and /k/; and the trilled [r̥] occurs only after the voiceless sound written *th*, that is, the initial consonant of *thin*. But allophones may also be in what is called free variation, like those of /p/ that occur in final position, described below.

Equally obvious and frequently cited examples are provided by the phonemes /p/, /t/, and /k/ and their allophones. Initially these phonemes are followed by an **aspiration**, that is, a breath-puff—phonetically [p<sup>h</sup>], [t<sup>h</sup>], and [k<sup>h</sup>], as in *par*, *tar*, and *car*. If one articulates the initial consonants of these words against the palm or the back of one's hand, one can clearly feel the

puff represented by the superior *h* of the phonetic transcriptions. But what we think of as the “*p*, *t*, and *k* sounds”—that is, the phonemes /p/, /t/, and /k/—have no such aspiration when preceded by /s/, as in *spar*, *star*, and *scar*. No such breath-puff can be felt on one’s hand; we have here different, but similar and nondistinctive, phones. However, the very fact that we think of the aspirated and unaspirated sounds as “the same” indicates that in each instance we are concerned with a single phoneme. There are in English no pairs of otherwise identical words differentiated only by the presence or absence of the aspiration. Again, we have complementary distribution of two similar sounds. There are still other allophones of /p/, /t/, and /k/, including the “unreleased” *p* that often occurs in final position as a variant of “aspirated” *p*. In *Stand up*, for instance, the lips may remain closed or there may be an aspiration; it makes no difference. The two final sounds [p̚] and [pʰ] are thus said to be in free variation.

It should be obvious that different languages will have different phonemic systems; whereas in English [pʰ] is merely an allophone of /p/, in Classical Greek /pʰ/ and /p/ were phonemic, with different alphabetical symbols for their representation: Φ, the aspirated sound that the Romans transliterated *PH*, and the unaspirated Π, which they transliterated *P*. It was similar with Θ /tʰ/ and Τ /t/ and with Χ /kʰ/ and Κ /k/, transliterated respectively *TH*, *T*, *CH*, and *C*.<sup>3</sup>

In the following treatment of the sounds of English we shall be concerned for the most part with only those sound units that are distinctive, or phonemic. Where there is occasion to refer to a sound simply as a sound, we shall follow the phonetician’s practice of writing it within square brackets, as we do in the representation of allophones.

## Exercise

1. Make as many new words as you can from each of the following by changing only the indicated sound. (You can make any change in spelling that you need to, as long as you change only one sound.)
  1. the first sound in *fill*, for instance, *bill*, *till*
  2. the first sound in *tease*, for instance, *peas*, *d’s*
  3. the last sound in *pat*, for instance, *pan*, *patch*
  4. the middle, vowel sound in *luck*, for instance, *lick*, *lake*
  5. the middle, vowel sound in *lad*, for instance, *lid*, *laid*

<sup>3</sup>It was not until post-Classical times that the Greek aspirated sounds became the fricatives represented by *ph* in *phone*, *th* in *theme*, and *ch* in German *ach*.



## THE VOWELS OF ENGLISH

Vowel phonemes function as the main sounds of syllables, either alone or combined with consonants, as in *able* (in which the *a*, representing the single vowel, makes the first syllable) and *program* (in which the *o*, preceded by a consonant sequence, makes the first syllable, and the *a*, preceded by a consonant sequence and followed by a single consonant, makes the second). In a few instances single vowel phonemes form words, as in *ah*, *aye*, and *owe*.

For even an elementary description of the sounds of English our spelling system is somewhat less than satisfactory. We cannot say, for instance, that any specific phoneme is symbolized by the letter *a* in Modern English. In *able* and *late*, the letter indeed symbolizes the name that we give to it; but the same letter symbolizes quite different phonemes in *fat*, *father*, *call*, and *above*. Phonemicists, however, use it with the value that it has in *father*, a value that, as we shall see later, it had in Old and Middle English and still has in languages other than English that use the Roman or the Greek alphabet. How it came to have other values for us is part of the history of English.

Older English values (and present precise or approximate values in other languages) will likewise be ascribed to *e* and *i*. In our transcriptions these letters will have the values that they have in recent French loan-words such as *café* and *police*. We shall thus transcribe *ha* as /ha/, *hay* as /he/, and *he* as /hi/.

The vowel phonemes of English are shown in the following chart, with each symbol (except for /ə/, which requires the more extensive treatment accorded it in the footnote) exemplified in a word, first given in conventional spelling, then in phonemic transcription. The terms **high**, **mid**, and **low** refer to the position of the tongue relative to the roof of the mouth, which may be gauged to some extent by the height of the jaw. The terms **front**, **central**, and **back** refer to the position of the highest part of the tongue. The quadrangle may be thought of as a cross section of the oral cavity, facing left. The various tongue positions are of course only approximate. All the back vowels except /ʌ/ and /ɑ/ are called **rounded vowels**, because of the position assumed by the lips in their articulation.

High-front /ɪ/ and high-back /ʊ/ combine with other vowels to form sequences traditionally called **diphthongs**; in such sequences the articulation starts as if for one vowel (/a/ or /ɔ/) and glides to or toward the position for /ɪ/ or /ʊ/: /aɪ/, as in *hide*; /aʊ/, as in *house*; and /ɔɪ/, as in *coil*. These sequences have many nondistinctive variants, or allophones.

In Modern English, vowel length, or the relative time one "holds" the vowel, is hardly ever a distinguishing factor. We distinguish, for example, *mad* from *mat*, *crag* from *crack*, and *slab* from *slap* (all with /æ/) not by the somewhat longer vowel in the first member of each contrasting pair, but by the final consonant; the length of the vowel is quite incidental. Some



|      | FRONT                  | CENTRAL                                | BACK                   |
|------|------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|
| HIGH | i ( <i>peat</i> /pit/) |                                        | u ( <i>pooh</i> /pu/)  |
|      | ɪ ( <i>pit</i> /pɪt/)  |                                        | ʊ ( <i>put</i> /put/)  |
| MID  | e ( <i>pate</i> /pet/) | ɜ ( <i>pert</i> /pɜt/), ə <sup>4</sup> | o ( <i>Poe</i> /po/)   |
|      | ɛ ( <i>pet</i> /pɛt/)  |                                        | ʌ ( <i>putt</i> /pʌt/) |
| LOW  | æ ( <i>pat</i> /pæt/)  |                                        | ɔ ( <i>paw</i> /pɔ/)   |
|      |                        |                                        | a ( <i>pot</i> /pat/)  |

speakers do indeed differentiate *halve* from *have*, *can* 'to put up in tins' from *can* 'to be able,' and *vary* from *very* by somewhat longer duration in the first member of each pair, but such differentiation is more or less sporadic.

It should be noted, however, that some writers on speech, particularly in England, write /i:/ for our /i/, /ɪ/ for our /ɪ/, /e:/ for our /e/, /ɛ/ for our /ɛ/, /u:/ for our /u/, and /ʊ/ for our /ʊ/, the colon merely *seeming* to signify a distinctive difference in length, but actually indicating one of quality. While to do so has the advantage of cutting down the number of phonetic symbols, the practice seems to indicate what it was never intended to do—that two vowels (of *peat* and *pit*, for example) are the same in quality, the only difference being in length.

## Exercises

2. How many syllables are there in each of the following words?

- |           |                  |                   |
|-----------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. bind   | 5. piano         | 9. unlikeliness   |
| 2. stamps | 6. terminate     | 10. confirmatory  |
| 3. coffee | 7. absolutely    | 11. pronunciation |
| 4. bottle | 8. impossibility | 12. indeterminism |

<sup>4</sup>This vowel, called *schwa*, occurs as the main vowel in unstressed syllables only, as in the first syllable of *alone* /ə'lɒn/, the middle syllable of *photograph* /fotəgræf/, the final syllable of *soda* /sodə/, and the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth syllables of *interminableness* /ɪntə'minə-bəl-nəs/. It is similar to both /ɜ/ and /ʌ/, but more back than the first, more front than the second. It functions as a consonant when it replaces /r/ in certain types of English speech in which preconsonantal and final /r/ are lacking, as in *beard* /bɪəd/ and *for* /fɔ/, in contrast to its occurrence as the main vowel of a syllable in the previous examples.

3. What conclusion as to the efficiency of our spelling as an indicator of pronunciation can you arrive at by examining such pairs as *son/pun*, *heard/bird*, *broad/fraud*, *group/sloop*, *pith/myth*, *great/trait*, *plaid/bad*, and *bed/said*?
4. What conclusion about our spelling can you draw from such pairs as *pull/gull*, *dough/rough*, *plaid/raid*, *shoe/sloe*, and *head/bead*?
5. Write the phonemic symbol for the vowel or diphthong sound shared by the words of each set.
 

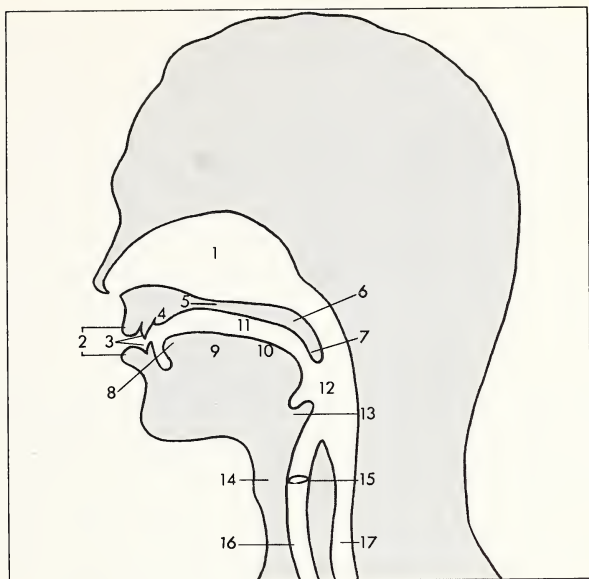
|                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. feet, niece, bean, we     | 9. moon, route, threw, fruit          |
| 2. limb, been, mitt, if      | 10. cook, put, bush, foot             |
| 3. wait, bay, made, waste    | 11. rope, boat, woe, toll             |
| 4. neck, said, bread, bell   | 12. cup, young, ton, tub              |
| 5. cap, plaid, sash, gnat    | 13. fraud, talk, bought, thaw         |
| 6. ply, nice, tries, pi      | 14. sock, spa, calm, rob              |
| 7. cow, proud, hound, browse | 15. oil, coy, join, toys              |
| 8. burn, sir, world, her     | 16. circus, bottom, token,<br>central |
6. Write the phonemic symbol for the described vowel sounds. For example, high-front vowel: /i/ or /ɪ/.
 

|                    |                      |                    |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. low-back vowel  | 3. mid-central vowel | 5. high-back vowel |
| 2. low-front vowel | 4. mid-back vowel    | 6. mid-front vowel |

## THE CONSONANTS OF ENGLISH

The English consonants are usually classified according to their place and manner of articulation. The diagram opposite, much conventionalized, shows the organs used in their articulation.

**Voiced and voiceless consonants** have been referred to heretofore (p. 54). We have seen, for instance, that /r/, normally a sound having resonance, or **voice**, because of the vibration of the vocal cords in its usual articulation, has a voiceless or partially voiceless allophone in given phonetic environments. The difference between /z/ and /s/ is likewise simply a matter of the presence in the first instance of voice and in the second of absence of voice, leaving only breath. But for /z/ and /s/ the difference is not allophonic, for, whereas those of us whose tongue is English regard the three varieties of the phoneme /r/, which we have discussed above, as the "same sound," we do not so regard /z/ and /s/. Whether we use /z/ or /s/ depends as a rule not upon phonetic environment,<sup>5</sup> but upon meaning: *zeal* and *seal*, *phase* and *face*, *use* (v.) and



- |                   |                    |                 |               |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Nasal cavity   | 6. Velum           | 11. Oral cavity | 16. Trachea   |
| 2. Lips           | 7. Uvula           | 12. Pharynx     | 17. Esophagus |
| 3. Teeth          | 8. Tip of tongue   | 13. Epiglottis  |               |
| 4. Alveolar ridge | 9. Front of tongue | 14. Larynx      |               |
| 5. Hard palate    | 10. Back of tongue | 15. Vocal cords |               |

*use* (n.) are different words. Such pairs are called **minimal** because the differences between the members are single sounds, which are thus different phonemes.<sup>6</sup>

Other such pairs, identically articulated except for the presence or absence of voice, are indicated in the chart below, which shows the place and manner

<sup>5</sup>Exceptions are such pairs as *house/houses* and *louse/lousy*, where the final /s/ of the first member becomes /z/ when between vowel sounds. (It must be remembered that we are here referring to sounds, not to spellings: the final written *e*'s of *house* and *louse* do not symbolize sounds, but are, in old-fashioned parlance, "silent letters.") For another important exception, see below, Chapter 4, pages 103–04, on the morpheme *-s*.

<sup>6</sup>In *usage* the medial consonant may be either /s/ or /z/, the first predominating in American English, the second in British. Here we have what has been referred to above in connection with other sounds (p. 54) as free variation. It makes no difference which we use, for meaning is not affected in the least. But the important distinction of *use* (n.) with /s/ and *use* (v.) with /z/—a distinction made by all speakers of English—would in itself be sufficient to establish /s/ and /z/ as separate phonemes.

of articulation of each of the consonants of English. It will be noted that only *ð*, *θ*, *ž*, *š*, *j*, *č*, and *ŋ* are different from our ordinary alphabetical symbols; *j* (without the wedge) is, however, used with quite a different value from that usual to it in English. Because *y* symbolized a rounded high-front vowel in Old English and must be used with this value in a subsequent chapter on history, we follow the practice of the International Phonetic Association and use *j* to symbolize the sound usually written *y* in English in such words as *year* and *young*—the value that *j* has in the other Germanic languages (compare German *Jahr* and *jung*). The double appearance of *w* in the chart is due to the fact that the sound has a double articulation, with rounding of the lips and raising of the back of the tongue toward the roof of the mouth (as if for /u/), the tongue then moving in the direction of the following vowel: it is thus both **velar** and **labial**.

**Stops**, also called **plosives** and **explosives**, are articulated by breaking down a complete stoppage set up at some point in the mouth. If the stoppage is made with the lips, the result is voiced /b/ or voiceless /p/; if made by placing the tongue against the inside surface of the gums of the upper front teeth—the **alveolar ridge**—the result is voiced /d/ or voiceless /t/; if made by the tongue and the back part of the mouth—the **velum**, or **soft palate**—the result is voiced /g/ or voiceless /k/.

**Fricatives**, also called **spirants**, are articulated by forcing breath through

## THE CONSONANTS

|                    |           | PLACE OF ARTICULATION |             |             |          |         |       |         |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|---------|-------|---------|
|                    |           | Labial                |             | Dental      |          | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|                    |           | bilabial              | labiodental | interdental | alveolar |         |       |         |
| Stops:             | voiced    | b                     |             |             | d        |         | g     |         |
|                    | voiceless | p                     |             |             | t        |         | k     |         |
| Fricatives:        | voiced    |                       | v           | ð           | z        | ž       |       |         |
|                    | voiceless |                       | f           | θ           | s        | š       |       | h       |
| Affricates:        | voiced    |                       |             |             |          | ǰ       |       |         |
|                    | voiceless |                       |             |             |          | č       |       |         |
| Nasals:            | voiced    | m                     |             |             | n        |         | ŋ     |         |
| Laterals:          | voiced    |                       |             |             | l, r     |         |       |         |
| Semivowels: voiced |           | w                     |             |             |          | j       | (w)   |         |

a narrow opening—a slit or a groove—between the teeth and the lower lip (voiced /v/ and voiceless /f/); between the tongue and the teeth (voiced /ð/ and voiceless /θ/, as in *then* and *thin*, respectively); against the alveolar ridge (voiced /z/ and voiceless /s/); and against the palate, somewhat farther back than the alveolar ridge (voiced /ʒ/, as medially in *azure*, and voiceless /ʃ/, as initially and finally in *shush*). The symbols *ž* and *š* are now generally preferred to *ʒ* and *ʃ* for the palatal fricatives. The aspirate /h/ has here been classified as a fricative produced in the **glottis**, that is, the opening between the vocal cords, but there is a great deal of variation in its place of articulation, which depends upon the vowels and semivowels that follow it.

**Affricates** are in effect stops plus fricatives and are sometimes written /dʒ/ and /tʃ/, the initial and final sounds of *judge* and *church*, respectively. It is now more common to regard them as unitary phonemes and write them /j/ and /č/.

**Nasals** are articulated by obstructing the oral passage and allowing the breath and voice to flow through the nose. English has three such sounds: /m/, with labial obstruction; /n/, with alveolar obstruction; and /ŋ/, with velar obstruction. The last occurs in English only medially and finally, as in *ringing*.

**Laterals**, sometimes called **liquids**, are articulated by placing the tongue against the alveolar ridge, as for /l/, or close to it, as for /r/, and allowing the breath to escape from the sides and, in the case of /r/, over the tip of the tongue as well. Both /l/ and /r/ have a number of allophones; some of those for /r/ have been discussed above (p. 54).

The **semivowels** /w/, as in *wet*, and /j/, as in *yet*, are so called from the fact that, though functioning as consonants, they are articulated like vowels. The double articulation of /w/ has already been described above (p. 60).

There have been numerous analyses of the English phonemic system, none of them—including that set forth here—wholly satisfactory. The widely known analysis by George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr., in their *Outline of English Structure* (Norman, Okla., 1951) sets up a system of nine “simple vowels,” the “vocalic nuclei” of syllables, which combine with semivowels to make “complex nuclei.” These vocalic nuclei may occur in combination with semivowels, for instance /w/ and /j/, to make what are traditionally called long vowels—thus, *Poe* /pow/, *pooh* /puw/, *pea* /pij/, *pay* /pej/, and the like. (Their system uses /y/ where we use /j/.)

## PHONOTACTICS

Arrangements of sounds, or **phonotactics**, may be expected to vary from language to language. Un-English sequences are reflected in the spellings of

such loan-words as *svelte*, *phthisis*, *tmesis*, *pterodactyl*, *psychiatry*, *sgraffito*, and *tsetse*. On the other hand, the consonant sequences of English, which seem so altogether "natural" to us, do not occur in, say, Japanese, a language in which each syllable tends to be composed of a single vowel or consonant followed by a single vowel, as in *kabuki* and *hibachi*.<sup>7</sup> English loan-words in Japanese are frequently modified according to Japanese patterns. The word *America* gives no trouble, since it is constructed exactly like a Japanese word; but *beefsteak* must be rendered as *bifuteki*, *brush* as *burashi*, and *necktie* as *nekutai*, all of which thus conform to Japanese phonotactic structure.

English has a good many words with initial sequences beginning with /s/ (/sl/ in *slay*, /sw/ in *sway*, /sn/ in *snide*, and so on), but none with, for instance, /šl/, as in German *Schlitz*; /šv/, as in German (ultimately Hebrew) *schwa*; or /šn/, as in German *schnauzer*. The first of these, a surname that has become a well-known trade name in America is frequently made to conform to an English pattern and accordingly pronounced /slits/. *Schwa* usually has /šw/ or /šv/, doubtless because the word is the exclusive property of the linguistically sophisticated and has no popular currency.<sup>8</sup> The third word cited, the name of a breed of dog popular in America, is as often as not pronounced with the English sequence /sn/. The un-English initial sequence indicated by the spelling of *sphinx* and *sphere* is now, with some effort, pronounced /sf/. Our ancestors presumably did not trouble themselves overmuch, for both words appear in early texts with *sp*.<sup>9</sup>

Even within a single language phonotactics may vary to some extent. For example, the sequence /sts/, occurring finally in the usual pronunciation of such words as *guests* and *posts*, does not appear at all in the speech of many speakers from the American inland South, who reduce it to /st/. This reduction, occurring in cultured as well as in uncultured speech, is documented in such roadside signs (many of them homemade) as "Tourist Are Welcome," "Rooms for Tourist," and "Our Guest Deserve the Best," which are quite frequent in the inland South. In the nonstandard speech of the area the plural suffix may be preserved by the insertion of /ə/ after the /t/. Some speakers may lack even final /st/ and say /ges/ and /pos/ for the singular, merely prolonging the /s/ to indicate the plural.

<sup>7</sup>The digraph *ch* of course stands for the single sound /č/.

<sup>8</sup>Even the eminent intellectual and supposed authority on lexicography, Dwight Macdonald, was not familiar with it when he reviewed *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* for the *New Yorker*, March 10, 1962, referring contemptuously to the symbol as "an upside-down 'e,' known in the trade as a 'schwa'" (p. 137). The use of the symbol is by no means new; the *OED*, a work that Macdonald admires tremendously, has used it since 1884.

<sup>9</sup>*Sphere* is only ultimately Greek. English seems to have got it from Old French *espepe*, which was later remodeled in both French and English in accordance with its Greek original.



## Exercises

7. Which of the following words begin with voiced sounds, and which begin with voiceless sounds?

- |         |          |           |           |             |
|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. pill | 5. jump  | 9. zinc   | 13. then  | 17. though  |
| 2. bill | 6. chump | 10. sink  | 14. these | 18. through |
| 3. gap  | 7. vine  | 11. them  | 15. thigh | 19. thumb   |
| 4. cap  | 8. fine  | 12. theme | 16. thin  | 20. thy     |

8. Which of the following words end with voiced sounds, and which end with voiceless sounds?

- |           |            |            |           |           |
|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. smooth | 5. breath  | 9. base    | 13. rice  | 17. half  |
| 2. truth  | 6. breathe | 10. praise | 14. rise  | 18. halve |
| 3. wreath | 7. bath    | 11. choose | 15. hence | 19. of    |
| 4. wreath | 8. bathe   | 12. noose  | 16. hens  | 20. off   |

9. Write the phonemic symbol for the described consonant sound.

- |                                    |                       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. voiceless bilabial stop         | 6. glottal fricative  |
| 2. voiced alveolar stop            | 7. voiced affricate   |
| 3. voiceless interdental fricative | 8. bilabial nasal     |
| 4. voiced labiodental fricative    | 9. velar nasal        |
| 5. voiceless palatal fricative     | 10. palatal semivowel |

10. Write the phonemic symbol for the consonant sound spelled by the italicized letters in the following words.

- |                |                     |                  |                   |                   |
|----------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. get         | 5. <i>chance</i>    | 9. <i>quick</i>  | 13. <i>ridge</i>  | 17. <i>ether</i>  |
| 2. gem         | 6. <i>chasm</i>     | 10. <i>hutch</i> | 14. <i>rush</i>   | 18. <i>either</i> |
| 3. <i>city</i> | 7. <i>chauffeur</i> | 11. <i>much</i>  | 15. <i>both</i>   | 19. measure       |
| 4. college     | 8. sure             | 12. <i>wing</i>  | 16. <i>clothe</i> | 20. future        |

11. What consonant sound or sequence begins each of the following words?

- |          |           |             |             |              |
|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. twin  | 4. smile  | 7. christen | 10. huge    | 13. schmaltz |
| 2. flow  | 5. strike | 8. squirrel | 11. shrimp  | 14. svelte   |
| 3. growl | 6. thread | 9. spume    | 12. schnook | 15. where    |

12. What consonant sound or sequence ends each of the following words?

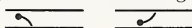
- |          |          |           |             |            |
|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| 1. else  | 4. bulge | 7. fix    | 10. plans   | 13. combed |
| 2. fifth | 5. mist  | 8. lacks  | 11. bank    | 14. cents  |
| 3. inch  | 6. bang  | 9. coughs | 12. cramped | 15. forged |

## PROSODIC FEATURES

In addition to the phonemes that have been discussed above, sometimes referred to as **segmental phonemes**, there are other features of speech that function, or may function, as phonemes—intonation, transition, and stress, which have been called **suprasegmental phonemes**. Many analysts prefer to regard them simply as **prosodic features**.

The first of these, **intonation**, is perhaps most simply described as the pattern resulting from sequences of pitch and from pauses. In such a sentence as *The doctor said I was suffering from catachresis*, it will be noted that the voice rises on the third syllable of the last word, then falls again to a pitch level one degree lower than that of the preceding words. But, if the news of our imaginary diagnosis were good, we might get *The doctor said I didn't have catachresis at all*, with the voice rising on *all*, then falling again. The more or less indifferent hearer might say *No?* with rising pitch, but no final fall. If, however, in response to *The doctor said I was suffering from catachresis*, the recipient of this fascinating tidbit suspected that his leg was being pulled, that *catachresis* was simply a silly made-up word, he might go along with what he thinks a joke and answer in mock seriousness, *No*, with falling pitch ending a degree lower than *The doctor said I was suffering from cata-*. An enthusiastic response to *The doctor said I didn't have catachresis at all* might be *Good!* starting at a very high pitch and ending at a very low one.

English has four readily distinguishable pitch levels. These may be more or less satisfactorily marked in various ways: for example, (1) by writing dots at various heights on a staff, with lines coming from these dots to indicate falling or rising pitch, thus,

  
 Good!                  No?

(2) by visualizing a four-line staff, the lines ranging from 4 (highest pitch) to 1 (lowest), but actually drawing in only the line appropriate for the pitch, thus (for the enthusiastic response),

  
 Good!

in which the top horizontal line represents pitch 4 and the lower one pitch 1; and, perhaps most usual in American studies, (3) by using numbers from 4 to 1 in the manner to be illustrated forthwith.

In such a system of marking it is customary to indicate the pitch level at the beginning of the pattern, at the end, and at the start of the most prominent syllable, that which receives the greatest stress. Most patterns are thus written with three pitch numbers; if the most prominent syllable is initial, there may be only two. According to such a system, the cited utterances (and a few others as well, for good measure) would be marked thus:

<sup>2</sup>*The doctor said I was suffering from cata<sup>3</sup>chresis<sup>1</sup>.*

Here and elsewhere it should be noted that the fall from pitch 3 to pitch 1 in *catachresis* is gradual. There is an intervening pitch 2, but it is impossible

to determine precisely where it and pitch 1 begin, and we do not attempt to do so, but merely indicate the gradual fall by the numeral at the end of the pattern. To proceed:

<sup>2</sup>*Cata<sup>4</sup>chresis<sup>1</sup>!* (Expressing alarm, or simply that one thinks *catachresis* is a strange word.)

<sup>2</sup>*Cata<sup>3</sup>chresis<sup>3</sup>?* (Expressing doubt.)

<sup>2</sup>*The doctor said I didn't have catachresis at <sup>3</sup>all<sup>1</sup>.*

<sup>2</sup>*No<sup>3</sup>?* (Indifference, more or less.)

<sup>3</sup>*No<sup>1</sup>.* (Going along with the gag.)

<sup>4</sup>*Good<sup>1</sup>!* (Enthusiastic relief.)

English utterances usually begin on pitch 2:

<sup>2</sup>*He was going to <sup>3</sup>Baltimore<sup>1</sup>.*

<sup>2</sup>*He was going <sup>3</sup>to Baltimore<sup>1</sup>.* (Not from it.)

Questions not beginning with interrogative words usually have final rising pitch, with no fall:

<sup>2</sup>*Is your mother <sup>3</sup>out<sup>3</sup>?*

But falling pitch may occur if there is an interrogative word such as *why*, *when*, *where*, *what*:

<sup>2</sup>*Where is your mother <sup>3</sup>going<sup>1</sup>?*

There are a number of other possibilities, particularly in questions, for instance:

<sup>2</sup>*Where <sup>3</sup>is your mother going<sup>1</sup>?* (You haven't made clear whether it is to Baltimore or to Timbuktu; I'm confused.)

Pitches are obviously relative to one another, as are stresses also—not absolute. Furthermore, there is a certain amount of variation among individuals, and considerable variation between American and British English. The examples given above are based on American pitch patterns.

Intonation patterns are ended by pauses, usually but not always indicated by the punctuation marks that we use in writing. These pauses, or **pitch terminals**, are meaningfully distinctive, thus:

*Your mother is busy*↓.

*Your mother is busy*↑?

Questions introduced by interrogative words may, however, take either the rising or the falling terminal. The rising pitch terminal in the sentence used above to illustrate pitch patterns—*Where is your mother going*↑?—indicates that the speaker has already been told but either did not comprehend or has forgotten, whereas the falling pitch terminal in *Where is your mother*

*going*↓.<sup>2</sup> indicates that the speaker has no notion where and is merely asking for initial information.

Intonation patterns occurring within sentences, as at the beginning and usually at the end of nonrestrictive elements, are indicated in writing by commas, thus:

*The men, who were willing to take the risk involved, stepped forward.*

Here there are distinct pauses, level rather than rising or falling, which indicate that all the men stepped forward. Compare *The men who were willing to take the risk involved stepped forward*, in which the lack of a pause after *men* makes it clear that some of the more timid souls stayed behind.

Compare also the following sentences, in which the same level pause is indicated by the comma in the first:

*We're having pretty, warm weather.*

*We're having pretty warm weather.*

For additional discussion of pitch terminals, see Chapter 5, pages 159–60.

**Transition**, sometimes unhappily called  **juncture**, is the name usually given nowadays to the manner in which we make divisions between sounds. Such divisions are always a part of the speaker's consciousness, but if they were always clear-cut in actual practice the older form *a nadder* would never have become *an adder*, nor would *an ekename* have become *a nickname*. Usually the phenomenon is indicated graphically by the spaces between words, but even so in actual speech *Grapette*, the name of a soft drink, may easily be taken for *gray pet* (a squirrel?), *grade A* for *gray day*, and *housewarming* for *house-swarming* (of termites). The oft-cited minimal pair *night rates* and *ni-trates* certainly *ought* to be distinguished by **open transition** in the first and **close transition** in the second. As often as not, however, they come out the same. Many of the examples cited for this phenomenon will seem somewhat contrived, like Daniel Jones's *plate-rack* and *play-track*; many people, including the present writer, have managed to live long and fairly happy lives without having occasion to refer to either plate-racks or play-tracks. Kemp Malone admits that his *eely* 'like an eel,' with open transition, as contrasted with *Ely*, with close transition, is a nonce word;<sup>10</sup> and James Sledd cites the equally contrived pairs *B for Brown/Beefer Brown* and *ill eagle/illegal* as examples of open and close transition.<sup>11</sup> It is of course important that we recognize transition as a prosodic factor. But we should also be aware that many speakers make no discernible distinction between *at all* and *a tall* in such sentences as *He's not at all, man* and *He's not a tall man*, in which the

<sup>10</sup>"The Phonemes of Current English," *Studies in Heroic Legend and in Current Speech* (Copenhagen, 1959), p. 241.

<sup>11</sup>*A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (Chicago, 1959), p. 36.

pause between *all* and *man* and the pitch patterns are really more important factors than the transitions in distinguishing the meaning.

Finally, there is the prosodic feature of **stress**, or loudness, which distinguishes such a minimal pair as *transfer* (n.) and *transfer* (v.). Unlike this example, *conduct* (n.) and *conduct* (v.), *minute* (n.) and *minute* (adj.) are not minimal pairs—that is, they are not identical in all elements except one—since *conduct* (n.) has /kan-/, *conduct* (v.) has /kən-/, and *minute* (n.) has /-ɪt/ whereas the identically written adjective has /-nut/ or /-njut/ and may have /maɪ-/ for its first syllable. In the latter pairs the differences in stress patterns cannot be said to be any more distinctive than the differences in vowel qualities.

In single words two degrees of stress are easily recognized: **primary** (also called **main stress**, **full stress**, **first stress**, and **strongest stress**), indicated by an acute accent mark, and **secondary** (also called **half stress**), indicated by a grave accent mark.<sup>12</sup> *Hardly*, for instance, has primary stress on its first syllable, but *hardware* has in addition secondary stress on its second. Some scholars, arguing reasonably enough that if a syllable is spoken at all it must have some degree of stress, regard the *ly* of *hardly* as having weakest stress and mark such syllables with breves, thus *impĕrturbăbly*. There is no objection to doing so, except the somewhat distracting fussiness of such transcriptions. We shall, more simply perhaps, and certainly more traditionally, regard such syllables as unstressed and not mark them in any way.

Since an overwhelming majority of English words have primary stress on their first syllables, it is really not necessary to mark initial primary stress in any way, regarding it simply as regular stress;<sup>13</sup> thus, words like *little*, *female*, and *beautiful* do not require the acute accent marks necessary in *impăct* (v.), *transfĕr* (v.), *rebĕl* (v.), *intĕrminable*, *retĕrn*, and *entrănce* 'enchant' (but compare *impăct* (n.), *transfĕr* (n.), *rebĕl* (n.), and *entrănce* 'way in,' all of which have regular stress). Many words with initial primary stress may have secondary stress as well, and this must be marked with a grave accent, thus: *hărdwăre*, *meditătĕ*, *regimĕnt* (v.) (but compare the noun *regiment*, with only initial stress), *hărmônizĕ*, and *homemăker*. Initial secondary stress must also be marked, as in *inĕxăct*, *părticipiăl*, and *mĕgalomăniă*.

In word groups we may recognize a degree of stress somewhat less strong than primary stress, but stronger than secondary. This is ordinarily marked by a circumflex accent mark, thus (with all stresses marked in the relevant word groups):

*Our hărdwăre givĕs hărd wĕăr.*

*The rĭght tăckle wăs măde by the rĭght tăckle.*

<sup>12</sup>Those scholars who regard the reduced primary stress in word groups (below, p. 68) as secondary stress use the term **tertiary stress** for our secondary stress.

<sup>13</sup>This follows the practice of Malone in "The Phonemes of Current English," pp. 242-43.

*a sêcond hândcâr*

*to go off the dêep ênd* (to give way to feelings)

*to go off the déep ênd* (of the pool. Compare *deepened* and *depênd*.)

*an éxtra drÿ màrtini* (a second one)

*an êxtra-drÿ màrtini* (only a whiff of vermouth)

It should be noted, however, that many speakers would not make the distinction in stress indicated in the last two examples but would instead use the stressing of the first phrase for both. For such speakers the position of the level internal pause would do the trick, thus, with the pauses (the level ones symbolized by vertical bars) and stresses indicated:

*an éxtra | drÿ màrtini*↓ (another)

*an éxtra-drÿ | màrtini*↓ (easy on the vermouth)

The diminished primary stress that concerns us here is of course not absolute, but relative to other stresses. In *ùnadùlteràted nònsense*, for instance, the first word in isolation would be *ùnadùlteràted*, and in some contexts the entire phrase might occur as *ùnadùlteràted nònsense*. Frequently, rhythm alone plays a part in the placement of stress, as in *the rôom ùpstàirs* and *the ùpstàirs rôom*.

Heightened primary stress, used for emphasis and usually going with pitch 4, may be indicated by double acute accent marks, as in *I dôn't mèan him; I mèan yôu*.

## Exercises

13. Match the numbered sentences with the lettered descriptions that follow. Intonation patterns signal the difference in meaning.

1. <sup>2</sup>Willie found a cat in the <sup>3</sup>basement<sup>1</sup>↓

2. <sup>2</sup>Willie found a cat in the <sup>3</sup>basement<sup>3</sup>↑

3. <sup>2</sup>Willie found a <sup>3</sup>cat in the basement<sup>1</sup>↓

- a. a question about where he found the cat
- b. a statement about what he found in the basement
- c. a statement about where he found the cat

4. <sup>2</sup>Who fell down the <sup>3</sup>chimney<sup>1</sup>↓

5. <sup>4</sup>Who fell down the chimney<sup>1</sup>↓

6. <sup>3</sup>Who fell down the chimney<sup>3</sup>↑

- a. an excited or concerned question about who fell
- b. a request to have what was said repeated
- c. a simple question about who fell there



7. <sup>2</sup>Politicians who are dis<sup>3</sup>honest<sup>2</sup>|<sup>2</sup>have bad repu<sup>3</sup>tations<sup>1</sup>↓  
 8. <sup>2</sup>Poli<sup>3</sup>ticians<sup>2</sup>|<sup>2</sup>who are dis<sup>3</sup>honest<sup>2</sup>|<sup>2</sup>have bad repu<sup>3</sup>tations<sup>1</sup>↓  
     a. a statement that all politicians are dishonest  
     b. a statement that some politicians are dishonest

14. Match the phrases on the left with the meanings on the right.

- |                               |                                    |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. mòre áctive   dírt remòver | a. a greater quantity of detergent |
| 2. móre   áctive dírt remòver | b. a livelier detergent            |
| 3. He's a squáre dâncer       | a. He dances conventionally        |
| 4. He's a squáre dâncer       | b. He performs quadrilles          |
| 5. mâke úp                    | a. cosmetics                       |
| 6. máke ùp                    | b. reconcile                       |
| 7. fâir officiâls             | a. ones in charge of a fair        |
| 8. fáir officiâls             | b. unprejudiced ones               |
| 9. She's prétty góod          | a. She's only average              |
| 10. She's prétty gòod         | b. She's quite good                |

15. Mark the primary stress in the following words:

- |             |              |              |               |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. polar    | 4. magician  | 7. infer     | 10. excellent |
| 2. polarity | 5. politics  | 8. inference | 11. apply     |
| 3. magic    | 6. political | 9. excel     | 12. applicant |

16. Mark the primary stress and the secondary stress (if there is one) in the following words:

- |                 |               |                  |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1. illustrate   | 5. hesitation | 9. vulnerability |
| 2. illustration | 6. hesitate   | 10. vulnerable   |
| 3. illustrative | 7. beautify   | 11. universe     |
| 4. hesitant     | 8. beautiful  | 12. university   |

17. Punctuation sometimes, although not invariably, represents prosodic features. Rewrite the following sentences, omitting the prosodic marks and adding appropriate punctuation.

- <sup>2</sup>Is your <sup>3</sup>sister at home<sup>3</sup>|<sup>3</sup>young man<sup>3</sup>↑
- Her côat is lìght blúe | and vèry stýlish↓
- Her côat is lìght | blúe | and vèry stýlish↓
- <sup>2</sup>Aunt <sup>3</sup>Tilly<sup>2</sup>|<sup>2</sup>who collects antima<sup>3</sup>cassars<sup>2</sup>|<sup>2</sup>found a shop that <sup>3</sup>specializes in them<sup>1</sup>↓
- <sup>2</sup>As an <sup>3</sup>áppetizer<sup>2</sup>|<sup>2</sup>he sêrved <sup>4</sup>râw<sup>4</sup>|<sup>4</sup>squíd<sup>1</sup>↓

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR WRITING SYSTEM

Despite the fact that writing is an innovation in human culture, having been around, as far as we can tell, for only an infinitesimal part of man's total history, and further despite the fact that vast numbers—perhaps a majority—of men are still blissfully illiterate, writing is uniquely important. If it is spoken language that humanizes us by distinguishing man from the lower animals, it is writing that civilizes us by enabling literate men to pass on detailed, permanent records of their accomplishments. Writing is our link with the past and with the future.

Ours is an inherited system of writing; like all alphabetical systems, it stems ultimately from Semitic writing. Semitic writing in its earliest stages was not truly alphabetical; rather, its symbols represented syllables consisting of a consonant followed by any vowel. But it did mark an important advance in writing because of the fact that these symbols stood for speech sounds rather than being merely **pictographs** (like the “writing” of the American Indians) or **ideographs** (like that of the Sumerians) or a mixture of the two (like the Egyptian hieroglyphics).<sup>14</sup>

The Greeks acquired the Semitic **syllabary**, which contained a number of symbols for consonants (that is, for syllables beginning with consonants) that did not exist in Greek; one of these unnecessary symbols was the very first in the Semitic syllabary, symbolizing an initial glottal stop called **aleph**. The Greeks, having no other use for it, used it as a vowel symbol, modifying its name to *alpha* in accordance with their own phonotactic patterns. They utilized the other unneeded symbols in the same way and later added a few additional symbols—those that we call *phi*, *chi*, and *psi*. The Greek idea of writing vowels provided us with an **alphabet** (the word, as everyone knows, comes from the first two letters, *alpha* and *beta*, the modifications of the Semitic *aleph* and *beth*) in the modern sense of the word.

The essentially Semitic alphabet with its Greek innovations was taken over by the Romans. It was this Semito-Greco-Roman alphabet that was introduced into England after the introduction of Christianity. The Germanic peoples, including those who migrated to Britain, already had a system of **runes**, angular letters adapted to cutting or scratching in wood or stone and used for charms, incantations, and the like. These runes are ultimately derived from the Roman alphabet or from some closely related Italic alphabet. Though they might perfectly well have been used for tracing on smoother surfaces, such as parchment and paper, for the voluminous writing that the English did after their conversion to Christianity, they were actually used only sporadically. Perhaps they suggested the old pagan times to the devout Christians that the English came to be. The script used in the Old English

<sup>14</sup>Specimens of these appear in John Algeo and Thomas Pyles, *Problems in the Origins and Development of the English Language* (New York, 1966), pp. 26–30.

manuscripts is not what the English might have learned from St. Augustine, but rather an Irish modification of the Roman script—the so-called Insular hand used for writing English until the Norman Conquest.

Since English had phonemes that either had never existed in Latin, like /θ/ and /æ/, or had been lost in post-Classical times, like /w/, it was necessary for English writers to supplement what they presumably got from the Irish missionaries who came shortly after St. Augustine by using the old runic symbol *þ* (named *thorn*) for /θ/ interchangeably with a crossed Irish *d* (*ð*) for the un-Latin sound and its voiced allophone (see below, pp. 317–18), and another runic symbol *ƿ* (named *wynn*) for /w/. With these additions the scribes, who were fair phonemicists, got along well enough, using the Roman digraph *ae* (or its ligatured form *æ*), which long before had acquired in Latin a value roughly similar to /æ/. Other languages have had to resort to similar makeshifts and subterfuges by the use of diacritical markings (*ö*, *č*, *ç*, and the like) or digraphs (*ch*, *sz*, *cz*, and the like).

Innovations made by French and Anglo-Norman scribes after the time of the Norman Conquest have left their mark—for instance, *ou* for /u/, as in Middle English *hous* (Old English *hus*); *v*, in the curved form *u*, for older *f* between voiced sounds, pronounced [v] in Old English despite its spelling; *w* (at first *uu*, whence the name of the letter *double u*, and later written in ligatured form); and the use of the digraph *ch* in *child* and the like, where Old English had used only *c*. Even so, English spelling did a fairly good job of indicating pronunciation until the Great Vowel Shift (see Chap. 9, pp. 336–337), in which all the long vowel sounds symbolized by *a*, *e(e)*, *i*, *o(o)*, and *(o)u* acquired quite different values, thus setting off the English values represented by these symbols from those represented by the same symbols in the languages of the Continent. Even the names of the letters themselves, except for *o*, changed as a result of this shift: *a*, with the value that it has when used as a phonemic symbol, came to be called /e/ *e* came to be called /i/, *i* came to be called /ai/, and *u* came to be called /ju/.

## Exercises

18. Below is a sample from four alphabets. The letters in each column correspond to one another. Show what the corresponding Roman letters of our alphabet would be by completing the last row.

[illegible]

19. Which letters in our alphabet are unnecessary in that they spell only sounds for which there are other more regular spellings available?
20. Circle the digraphs used in the following spellings:
 

|          |          |           |          |            |
|----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| 1. chant | 3. stack | 5. singe  | 7. bleed | 9. cousin  |
| 2. clash | 4. sing  | 6. thrust | 8. grow  | 10. mainly |
21. English does not make much use of diacritical markings, but each of the following words has another spelling with such a mark. Write it, using a dictionary if you are uncertain.
 

|           |          |          |           |            |          |
|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| 1. facade | 2. crepe | 3. naive | 4. canyon | 5. matinee | 6. suede |
|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|

## THE ENGLISH SPELLING SYSTEM

Modern English spelling has been called chaotic, which it is not. There is a reason for every supposed inconsistency, and there is far more consistency than is realized by those who are waggishly fond of pointing out, say, the “different sounds” of the letters *gh* (as if letters had sounds) in *dough* and *tough*. The fact is that *gh* earlier consistently indicated the final sound of German *ach* (with a palatal variety, as in *ich*), a sound that in English either has been lost entirely or under certain conditions has become /f/. But English writing—old-fashioned and conservative as it has become—goes on writing the digraph just as if the sound it symbolized were still with us.

We now proceed to a detailed examination of English spelling. Crabbed and difficult it may seem, but it is not, as we have said, senseless or chaotic, as is popularly supposed. Even to attempt to give detailed explanations of every apparent anomaly would, however, require another volume.

Words illustrating spellings are given, phoneme by phoneme. Because of their intrinsic interest, words illustrating a few British English pronunciations, particularly proper names with which Americans are more or less familiar, have been included. These are labeled *BE*. Occasionally distinctively American English usages, with regard to both spelling and pronunciation, have been labeled *AE*. Nothing prescriptive is implied in the illustrations. We are concerned with how spellings symbolize pronunciations that are current, sometimes alongside more widespread alternative pronunciations, and not in the least with how the reader ought to pronounce every one of the cited words. We share the view of the great English phonetician Daniel Jones “that people should be allowed to speak as they like.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, 13th ed. (London and New York, 1967), Introduction, p. xviii.

First we list words with what we think of as regular, ordinary, usual, or common spellings of the various phonemes. The consonants are shown in all the positions in which they may occur, and in the various sequences in which they may occur. After the semicolon come spellings that are relatively rare; some of these may occur only in the word cited.

Certain of the vowel phonemes, for instance /i/, may either stand alone (end syllables), as in *me* and *reason*, or be followed by a consonant or a consonant sequence, like the same vowel in *reek* and *east*. Examples of their occurrence in both situations are given, even though the spelling may often be the same.

## THE SPELLING OF VOWEL PHONEMES

/i/

(Stressed) *see*, *me*, *sea*, *meet*, *meat*, *mete*, *chief*, *receive*, *evil*, *accretion*; *trio*, *police*, *quay*, *key*, BE *geyser* 'gas water-heater,' *people*, BE *Beauchamp*, *Aesop*, BE *encyclopaedia*, *Oedipus*, *Leigh*, *tester* 'canopy,' BE *retch* 'vomit,' *camellia*

(Unstressed) *thematic*, *crises*; *employee*, *virtuosi*, *formulae*, BE *oedema*

### COMMENTS:

1. *Tester*, *retch*, and *camellia* are highly exceptional in that simple *e* before, respectively, the consonant sequence /st/, the phoneme /č/ written *tch* and a double consonant symbol has the value /i/. One would expect only /ε/ in such situations. All three words do in fact occur with /ε/. *Retch* with /i/ is current in British English only, though pronunciation with /ε/ is becoming increasingly common in England.

2. The pronunciation /i/ for *i* is characteristic of late loan-words from the Romance languages (mainly French, Italian, and Spanish). Younger-generation and middle-generation speakers have /i/ in Latin plurals in *-i* as well, for example, *fungi* and *alumni*. In such words taken straight from Latin, older-generation speakers have /ai/. The pronunciation of *i* as /i/ in the stressed syllables of words recognized as Latin—for example, *via*, which used to have only /ai/—is an innovation. It has, however, gained ground so rapidly that pronunciation of the cited word as /vaɪə/ is in some circles considered old-fashioned.

3. In Latin plurals in *-ae*, like the cited *formulae*, younger-generation speakers are likely to have /ai/. Thus, what younger speakers call girl graduates—/ə'lɑmnai/—is precisely what older speakers call boy graduates—a purely verbal confusion of the sexes, which need not be regarded as alarming. The newer pronunciation of *ae* as /ai/ began as a result of the teaching of the "reformed"

pronunciation of Latin in the schools. In all types of speech the older cultivated tradition survives in the stressed syllables of *Caesar*, *medi(a)eval*, and *encyclo-p(a)edia*.

4. American spelling usually simplifies the digraphs in such words as *encyclo-paedia* and *amoeba*, writing only *e*. However, classical proper names, such as *Aeolus* and *Croesus* and the names cited above, always have the digraph.

5. *Axes* and *bases*, when these are plurals of *ax* and *base*, have /ɪ/ or /ə/ in their endings, not the /i/ of the identically written plurals of *axis* and *basis*.

6. By ill-informed analogy with *crises* and other third declension Latin plurals used in English, the plural forms of the French loan-words *premise* and *process* have for some speakers acquired an /i/ in their suffixes. The plural of *sequence*, genuinely Latin but not of the third declension, likewise sometimes has /iz/ in its final syllable. These are regarded by many as pseudolearned and somewhat pretentious pronunciations. (See also above, p. 43.)

7. In self-conscious platform speech, whether or not uttered from a podium, /i/, replacing usual /ɪ/ or /ə/, occurs in the first syllable of *essential*, *effect(ive)*, *efficient*, and similar words. Such pronunciations seem to be spreading and, because of their frequent occurrence on television and radio, and also doubtless in the pulpit, are in certain circles considered rather elegant.

8. Many American speakers have the same very slightly stressed /i/ in the final syllables of words like *city*, *taxi*, and *Betty*, but /ɪ/ and its high central allophone [ɪ̟] are more usual in American and British speech as a whole.

9. The pronunciation of *Beauchamp* is more accurately reflected in the alternative spelling *Beecham*.

/ɪ/

(Stressed) *bid*, *spirit*, *omission*, *omit*; *England*, *been*, *bier*, *near*, *mere*, *pretty*, (old-fashioned) *teat*, *weird*, *sieve*, *women*, *busy*, *build*, *symbol*, *pyrrhic*

(Unstressed) *eradicate*, *imagine*, *dismay*, *appropriate*, *nuclear*, *humid*, *sullied*, *bucket*, *malice*, *palace*, *garbage*, *marry*, *money*; *hysteria*, *Aeneas*, *Israel*, *minute*, *biscuit*, *marriage*, *mischief*, *forfeit*, *bargain*, *tortoise*, *polyp*, *Tyrwhitt*, *yesterday*, *specie*, *Burleigh*, BE *Calais* /kælɪ/, BE *café* /kæfɪ/, *Gethsemane*, *recipe*, *guinea*, *coffee*, BE *ballet*, *taxi*, BE *Beaulieu* /bjulɪ/, BE *Carew* /kerɪ/, *chamois*

## COMMENTS:

1. Other words than *been* with stressed /ɪ/ written *e(e)* before /n/ are *Jenny* and BE *Greenwich* /grɪnɪʃ/. *Jenny* with /ɪ/ is rare nowadays in American English except for the inland South, but still widely current in British English. It was certainly ʃɪnɪ not ʃenɪ who kissed Leigh Hunt as recounted in his poem "Jenny Kissed Me When We Met."



2. In the inland American South /ɪ/ is widespread in words written with *e* before any nasal; *ten* is not distinguished from *tin*, *gem* from *Jim*, and *Mencken* may rhyme with *Lincoln*.

3. In addition to *pretty*, stressed /ɪ/ is written *e(e)* before consonants other than /n/, /ŋ/, and /r/ in *reneege*, *breeches*, *steelyard*, regional *creek*, and BE *threepence*. The word cited last may also have /ɛ/, /ʌ/, and /ʊ/, so that the American in England can hardly miss, so long as he does not use the pronunciation with /i/ suggested by the spelling. Pronunciation of *Negro* with /ɪ/, though perfectly natural, is offensive to many, who prefer to hear /i/ in the stressed syllable.

4. British speakers use /bɪn/ as an unstressed form; some use it always. Most, however, use /bɪn/ for the stressed form.

5. Words ending in *day*, like *yesterday*, the cited *holiday*, and the names of the days of the week, which were indeed originally compounds, are usually reanalyzed in younger-generation speech and thus pronounced with /de/ rather than /di/; these are spelling pronunciations and may be partly due to the “overpronunciation” of those who speak with presumed authority over TV and radio.

6. The *iren* of *Cirencester* /sɪsɪ(s)tə/ and the *uth* of *Ruthven* /rɪvən/ are British curiosities. Ruthwell, the town in Scotland where a famous runic monument is preserved, is nowadays referred to as the spelling seems to indicate, but those who are really “with it” say /rɪvəl/ or /rɪðəl/, with upraised eyebrows for those—usually “Yanks” or “Sassenachs”—so lacking in *savoir dire* as to say /rʌθwəl/.

7. For an alternative American pronunciation of final unstressed /ɪ/, see “/i/,” Comment 8.

8. The pronunciation of BE *Beaulieu* is better indicated by the alternative spelling *Bewley*.

9. Many Americans have /ə/ rather than unstressed /ɪ/ in words like *humid*, *bucket*, *palace*, *minute*, and *tortoise*.

/e/

(Stressed) *may*, *basin*, *made*, *waste*, *change*, *raise*, *maid*; *yea*, *great*, *rein*, *reign*, *eh*, *trey*, *weigh*, *freight*, *Mae*, *maelstrom*, *gauge*, BE *gaol*, BE *Ralph*, BE *halfpenny*, *mesa*, *fête*, *chef* (d’oeuvre), *champagne*, *Montaigne*, AE *ballet*, AE *café*, AE *melee*,

(With secondary stress) *Castlereagh*

(Unstressed) *amoral*, *foray*, *survey* (n.); *emir*, BE *foyer*

/ɛ/

(Stressed) *met*, *hence*, *fetch*, *better*, *terror*, *head*, *bear*, *rare*, *hair*; *said*, *says*, *many*, *Thames*, BE *ate*, *Pall Mall*, *catch*, *catsup*, *aeronaut*, AE *Aeschylus*, *friend*, *heifer*, *leopard*, *Reynolds*, *phlegm*, *bury*, *Leicester*

(Unstressed) *adept* (n.), *aesthetic*

## COMMENTS:

1. In words like *bear* and *hair*, many speakers in the American South and in New England have /æ/ instead of /ɛ/. In the northern part of the country /ɛ/ may occur before /r/ followed by a vowel in words with stressed vowels written with *a*, like *carrot*, *marry*, and *barrel*. In such speech the two last words are pronounced exactly like *merry* and *beryl*.

2. The British pronunciation /ɛt/ for *ate* is in American English usually considered substandard. Pronunciation as /et/, that usual in American English, is also current in British English, but is somewhat less frequent than /ɛt/.

3. *Pellmell*, the adjective and adverb, is the same as the street name *Pall Mall* and indicates by its spelling the traditional pronunciation. No distance at all from Pall Mall is the Mall, which is not a street but a processional way leading from the Admiralty Arch to Buckingham Palace. It is, however, not the /mæl/, as an unsuspecting American, having mastered *Pall Mall*, might suppose, but the /mæɪl/. According to Daniel Jones, in his *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, many Londoners who are not members of West End clubs use /æ/ in both parts of the street name.

4. In the American South, /e/ is frequent in *Mary*, *Sarah*, and *area*, which elsewhere have /ɛ/.

5. Pronunciation of *catch* with /ɛ/ (alongside /æ/) is widely current in Standard American English. It is written "ketch" in dialect writing, the distorted spelling being intended to indicate a nonstandard pronunciation, but not really doing anything of the sort.

6. *Catsup* is nowadays frequently pronounced by the overcareful as the spelling seems to indicate it "should" be, but the traditional pronunciation is /kɛʃəp/. The word has nothing to do with a sup for a cat, but comes from Malay and is probably ultimately Chinese. The variant spelling *ketchup*, had it become the more widely used, might have aided in preserving the historical pronunciation, both of the stressed vowel and of the medial consonant.

7. The pronunciation of *Leicester* is better indicated by its variant spelling, *Lester*.

/æ/

(Stressed) *pat*, *patch*, *batter*, *placard*; *Spokane*, AE *aunt*, AE *laugh*,  
AE *draught*, *plaid*, *baa*, *ma'am*, *salmon*, AE *half*, *Ælf*ric, *meringue*

(Unstressed) *avalanche*

## COMMENTS:

1. The spelling with *i* occurs only in recent French loan-words such as *guimpe*, *lingerie*, and the now rare *pince-nez*. The second of these is usually /lanʃərə/ in the pronunciation of those who sell ladies' underwear, and *pince-nez* has become more or less archaic in view of the fact that few eminent persons

of recent times except Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Bernard Baruch have worn such optical appurtenances.

2. Many Americans have /a/ in *aunt*, but such a pronunciation is somewhat artificial. This author had an /ant/ Virgie and an /ænt/ Cora. The pronunciation in each instance was that preferred by the lady in question; but a half-century ago /ant/ was considered an innovation in most types of American English.

/3/

(Stressed only) *her, were, err, turn, burr, flurry, heard, bird, shirr, word, worry; journal, Beirne, myrtle, myrrh, colonel, masseur, chartreuse, (hors) d'oeuvre, Goethe, Göttingen*

#### COMMENTS:

1. This phoneme, except for *colonel* and a few words of foreign origin (including proper names) recently introduced into English, occurs only before written *r*. In *colonel*, the pronunciation is based upon the French variant *coronel*.

2. A single symbol is sufficient to represent both the **rhotacized** variety (with tongue in position as for /r/) and the **unrhotacized** (/r/-less), most Americans having the former. In reading a transcription of *bird* as /bɜd/ or *fur* as /fɜ/, for instance, those who have preconsonantal and final /r/ will pronounce [bɜrd] and [fɜr]: the difference between the rhotacized and the unrhotacized variety is phonetic, not phonemic.

3. Since /3/ results from the coalescence of various earlier vowels before /r/, it is not surprising, in view of our conservative spelling practices, that we should find so many spellings for it.

4. Some New Yorkers and Deep Southerners have /31/ rather than /3/ before a consonant, a pronunciation inaccurately represented in dialect writing by *oi*, as in "boid," "moider," and the like.

5. Some speakers have /u/ in such words as *chartreuse, masseuse, and danseuse*.

6. In American English *liqueur* usually has /-3/, in British English, /-juɔ/.

7. *Pierce* used to have /3/, a pronunciation reflected in Falstaff's punning "If Percy be alieu, Ile pierce him" (*I Hen. IV*, V.iii.59) and probably also in the title of Thomas Nash's *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), that is, "purse penniless." For the word as a proper name, the /3/ is still current in Boston.

8. Most American speakers, unpracticed in the articulation of unrhotacized /3/, use the more familiar rhotacized variety in the words cited in Comment 5, unless they are among those who simply give up and use /u/. The rhotacized variety is also heard in American attempts at *Goethe* and *Göttingen*; those who have had special training in modern foreign languages will of course make an effort to pronounce properly rounded un-English vowels in all such words.

9. As the name of a street in Chicago, *Goethe* is very sensibly pronounced /goθɪ/.  
 10. Standard British English and certain types of Atlantic coastal American English have /ʌ/, instead of the usual AE /ɜ/, before /r/ followed by a vowel, as in *flurry*, *courage*, and *borough*.

/ʌ/

(Stressed) *run*, *runt*, *butter*, *blood*, *touch*, *does*, *other*, *among*; *twopence*, *uh-huh*, *ugh*, *was* (as frequently pronounced in stressed as well as unstressed positions), *pandit* (also with /a/, and occasionally with /æ/; but note the better known spelling of the same word as *pundit*)

(Unstressed) *uproarious*, *ulterior*, *umbrella*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The vowel of *son*, *monk*, *love*, and *come*, and other such words with Modern English /ʌ/ written *o*, was written *u* in Old English times. Contiguous stroke letters resulting in (for instance) *luue* for *love* (Old English *lufu*), account for the spelling with *o* in such words. Until early Modern English times the angular variant of *u*—that is, *v*—was written only initially, where it stood for either vowel or consonant; other than initially *u* likewise stood for either vowel or consonant. In other words, the choice between *u* and *v* was entirely a matter of position. In all the cited words, *o* is far clearer in writing than the Old and early Middle English spellings with *u*, particularly in manuscript, where *n* and *u* can look identical, and *u* followed by *m* can easily strike the eye as a succession of five strokes. In some words, however, we have returned to the earlier spelling with *u*, for example, *nun* (compare Chaucer's *nonne*, from Old English *nunne*).
2. *Cholmondeley* /čʌmli/ is a well-known British curiosity.

/u/

(Stressed) *food*, *sue*, *thew*, *jewel*, *flute*; *to*, *two*, *womb*, *shoe*, *you*, *croup*, *tour*, *through*, *brougham*, *Bohun*, *pooh*, *Cowper*, *beauty*, *fruit*, (nautical) *leeward*, *neuter*, *view*, BE *manoeuvre*, *bouillon*, *rendezvous*, *ragout*, BE *Leveson* (-Gower), *lieu*, *pugh*, *buhl*, *Hulme*, *Sioux*

(Unstressed) (old-fashioned) *lasso*, *burgoo*, *nephew*, *purlieu*, *Hindu*, *tuition*, *Devereux*.

#### COMMENTS:

1. If we had to ascribe a “typical” spelling to /u/, it would have to be the *oo* of native words like *tooth* and *soothe*, though *oo* has other values, as in *foot* and *flood*, and also occurs in a number of loan-words. Spelling with *u*, as in *duty*, and with *ue*, as in *sue*, occurs in a number of loan-words from Old French and also in some native words influenced by the French spelling. Latin words also have *u*, as in *dual* and *illuminate*.

2. Spellings other than those with *o*, *oo*, and *ou* as a rule represent, or have represented, the sequence /ju/, which still occurs regularly after the labial and velar stops, as in *beauty* (compare *booty*), *pew* (compare *pooh*), *gewgaw* (compare *goo*), and *cute* (compare *coot*), after the labial fricatives, as in *fuel* and *view*, and after /m/, as in *mute* (compare *moot*). In British English and in some types of American English the sequence occurs after the dental stops, as in *duty* and *tune*, and after the dental fricatives, as in *thew*, *Zeus*, and *suit*. It is usual in British English, and in some types of American English, after /n/, as in *nude*, *neuter*, and *new*, but it is likely that most Americans have simple /u/ after the dental nasal.

3. In the usage of some speakers, mostly older-generation ones, /ju/ may occur after /l/, as in *lewd* and *flute*, and /r/, as in *rude* and *rumor*.

4. Initially and after /h/ the /j/ is always present in the “o-less” words, as in *Euclid*, *use* (compare *ooze*), *hew* (compare *who*), and *human*.

5. Because of their doubled consonants after /u/, *butte* and *tulle* must be considered exceptional spellings.

#### /ʊ/

(Stressed) *good*, *poor*, *put*, *sure*, *wolf*, *could*; *tour*, *boulevard*, *Boer*, *Wodehouse*, *worsted* ‘fabric,’ *Worcester*

(Unstressed) *superior*, *factual*; *Toulouse*

#### COMMENTS:

1. *Poor* also occurs with /ɔ/ and /o/.

2. In some words /ʊ/ varies with /u/, for instance, *broom*, *room*, AE *hoof*, AE *roof*, and (perhaps less frequently) AE *root*.

3. Fairly recently, but long enough ago to be recorded in current American dictionaries, *worsted* as the name of the fabric or yarn acquired a pronunciation based upon the spelling, so that many speakers, mostly younger-generation, use a pronunciation identical with that of the past form of *to worst*.

#### /o/

(Stressed) *go*, *toe*, *road*, *ode*, *grow*, *owe*; *brooch*, *soul*, *oh*, *ohm*, *though*, *folk*, *Holmes*, *yeoman*, *cologne*, *provost* (marshal), *sew*, *chauffeur*

(Unstressed) *tobacco*, *whatsoever*, *narrow*, *thorough*; *cocoa*, *bureau*, *Pharaoh*, *depot*

#### COMMENTS:

1. Many speakers in New England and the South, Canada, the English Midland, northern England, and Scotland have /o/ before *r* in such words as *floor*, *pore*, and *pour*. Such speakers distinguish *four* /for/ from *for* /fɔr/, *ore* /or/ from

*or* /ɔr/, *hoarse* /hors/ from *horse* /hɔrs/, and *mourning* /mɔrnɪŋ/ from *morning* /mɔrnɪŋ/. This distinction, which is recorded in American dictionaries, is a historical one, but is not maintained by speakers of Standard British English and by many Americans, who have /ɔ/ in all such words.

2. In the unstressed final syllables of familiar, frequently used words like *tobacco*, *narrow*, and *thorough*, /o/ used to occur only in overcareful pronunciation, but is now widely current among younger speakers, who seem quite unaffectedly to pronounce the same unstressed vowel in familiar *narrow* as in *Nero*, and in *thorough* as in (with initial stress) *Thoreau*. Many older speakers have /ə/ or what has been described by John S. Kenyon and Thomas A. Knott as a vowel “nearly like [ʊ]” (square brackets added) in such familiar words (*Pronouncing Dictionary of American English* [Springfield, Mass. 1951], under “-ow”).

3. Public speakers nowadays often have /o/ in the initial unstressed syllables of such words as *official*, *occasion*, *commission*, and similar words written with doubled consonants after *o*. This essentially artificial practice is comparable to the treatment of the unstressed initial syllables of *essential*, *effective*, and the like discussed above under “/i/,” Comment 7.

/ɔ/

(Stressed) *cause*, *law*, *awe*, *war*, *quart*, *false*, *call*, *off*, *or*, (for many speakers) *ore*, *broad*, (for many) *board*, *taught*, *thought*, (for many) *door*, (for many) *course*, *gone*, BE *shone*; *talk*, *falcon*, *Faulkner*, *Strachan*, *Gloucester*, BE *Marlborough*, (for the Oxford college) *Magdalen* /mɔdlin/

(Unstressed) *automaton*, *landau*, *Omaha*, *Utah*; *Arkansas*, *Mackinac*, AE *reservoir*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The spelling “shore” for *sure*, beloved of dialect writers, indicates a pronunciation that is standard in all types of English. The written *o* may, depending upon the type of speech used by the writer himself, indicate either /o/ or /ɔ/. The most usual pronunciation of the word is of course that with /ʊ/.

2. *Omaha* and *Utah* may also have final /a/.

3. American English shows considerable variation between /a/ and /ɔ/. In some regional types there may be no distinction between *naughty* and *knotty*, *auto* and *Otto*, *daughter* and *dotter*. In most types of American speech the first of each pair cited will have /ɔ/ and the second /a/. Some southwestern speech makes no distinction before /r/, as in *or* and *are*, *form* and *farm*, having only /a/ in all four cited words, rather than /ɔ/ for the first and /a/ for the second member of each pair. The distribution of /a/ and /ɔ/ before /g/, after /w/, and before /r/ followed by a vowel is, as Hans Kurath says in *A Phonology and Prosody of Modern English* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1964) “highly erratic, varying not



only regionally, but from word to word" (p. 112). The present writer has /ɔ/ in *log*, *dog*, and *fog*, but /a/ in *bog* and *cog*; /a/ in *moral*, but /ɔ/ in *oral*; and /a/ in *swamp*, *swan*, and *wash*; other speakers may have quite a different distribution of the two vowels in these words.

4. *Falcon*, which used to be /fɛkən/, has acquired a spelling pronunciation /fælkən/. The traditional pronunciation survives in the proper name *Fa(u)lkner*.

/a/

(Stressed) *father*, *far*, *heart*, *stop*; *solder*, *ah*, *palm*, *sergeant*, *baccarat*, *bureaucracy*, *embouchure*, *ennui*, *kraal*, *ma'am* (more usually with /æ/)

(Unstressed) *grandpa*, BE *transform*; *purdah*, BE *fracas* /fræka/, *ensemble*, *Armagh*

#### COMMENTS:

1. In "short o" words like *cob*, *got*, *god*, *clock*, *don*, *botch*, *lodge*, *bosh*, and *Rosalind*, /a/ occurs in American English everywhere except eastern New England and western Pennsylvania. In words in which historical short o occurs before /f/, /θ/, /s/, or /ŋ/, the vowel /ɔ/ predominates in most types of American English, as in *scoff*, *moth*, *loss*, and *long*. The variation between /a/ and /ɔ/ before /g/, after /w/, and before /r/ plus a vowel has been discussed above under "/ɔ/," Comment 3.

2. The /a/ value of *eau* in *bureaucracy* is due to the analogy of other words in *-ocracy*, like *democracy* and *plutocracy*.

3. Earlier /æ/, preserved in American English, has in British English become /a/ in most words in which it is followed by /f/, /θ/, or /s/ (*staff*, *path*, *ask*) or by /m/ or /n/ plus another consonant (*example*, *demand*). Consequently *a* (also *au*, as in *laugh*, and *al*, as in *half*) represents /a/ in British English in a good many words in which it represents /æ/ in American English. There are about 150 commonly used ones, listed in John S. Kenyon's *American Pronunciation*, 10th ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1961), pp. 179–80.

4. For the sequence /wa/ in French loan-words, see "/w/," Comment 6.

5. In *envelope* and *envoy*, naturalized English words of long standing, pronunciation with pseudo-French /a/ in the first syllables began as a modern affectation.

/aɪ/

(Stressed) *ride*, *mild*, *kind*, *die*, *diet*, *my*, *dye*, *style*; *eye*, *ay*, *aye*, *pi*, *night*, *Geiger* (counter), *geyser* 'hot spring,' *height*, *kaiser*, *island*, *aisle*, *buy*, *guile*, *maestro*

(Unstressed) *ironic*, *profile*, *psychiatry*, *enzyme*, *fungi*

## COMMENTS:

1. The sequence /waɪ/ is written *oi* in *choir*.
2. For final /aɪ/ written *i* and *ae* in Latin loan-words, see “/i/,” Comment 2.

/aʊ/

(Stressed) *how*, *house*; *bough*, *doughty*, *Macleod*, *kraut*(Unstressed) *outdo*, *however*, *hoosegow*

/ɔɪ/

(Stressed) *toy*, *toil*; *buoy* (sometimes /bʊɪ/ in AE), *Reuters* (the English news agency), *Boulogne*(Unstressed) *poinsettia*, *typhoid*, *carboy*, *borzoi*

/ə/

(Unstressed only) *alone*, *permanent*, *china*, *Noah*, *meridian*, *rarefy*, *fuel*, *divert*, *scarify*, *lion*, *domestic*, *melody*, *melon*, *famous*, *limousine*, *supreme*, *suspense*, *syrupy*, *bonus*, (preceded by /j/) *regular*; AE *renaissance*, *blancmange*, *authority*, *bureaucrat*, *foreign*, *Chatham*, *Lincoln*, *Chisholm*, *borough*, *Edinburgh*, *Aeschylus*

## COMMENTS:

1. It is obviously impossible to cite typical spellings of /ə/.
2. Any unstressed vowel is capable of reduction to /ə/, and so many have been thus reduced that /ə/ is the most frequently occurring vowel in our language.
3. Some Americans, as well as most speakers of British English, may have /ɪ/ rather than /ə/ in unstressed syllables written *e* or *i*.
4. The not infrequent /ə/ for the final syllables of *Cincinnati*, *Missouri*, *Miami*, and *anti-* is difficult to account for; the /ə/ may be attributable to overteaching in the nineteenth century, when pronunciation with /ɪ/ in the final syllables of *sofa*, *Martha*, *Cuba*, and other such words (written, however, with *a*) became unfashionable.
5. Apostrophes do not usually symbolize sounds, but those in *B'nai B'rith* symbolize /ə/.
6. To the spellings already cited must be added, for those speakers whose speech is “r-less,” *ar*, as in *burglar*; *er*, as in *butter*; *ir*, as in *nadir* /nedə/ (but sometimes /nedɪə/); *oar*, as in *cupboard*; *oir*, as in *avoirduois*; *or*, as in *motor*; *our*, as in *glamour* and a number of words that in British English have *our* in contrast to AE *or*, for instance, *labour/labor*; *ur*, as in *femur* and *bifurcate*; and *yr*, as in *satyr*. All these spellings represent /ə/ in the speech of those who lack pre-consonantal and final /r/.

7. In *r*-less speech, *r* represents nonsyllabic /ə/ in a good many stressed syllables. It is rare after /a/ and may or may not occur after /ɔ/, as in *for*. It always occurs, however, after /ɪ/, as in *fear*; after /ɛ/, as in *mare*; after /ʊ/, as in *poor*; after /o/ in the speech of those who have /o/ in such words as *ore* and *four*; and likewise after /aɪ/ and /aʊ/, as in *fire* and *our*.

## Exercises

22. Match each word on the left with a word on the right that has the same stressed vowel or diphthong sound.

- |              |           |               |            |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| 1. freight   | a. aisle  | 8. bough      | a. blood   |
| 2. heifer    | b. build  | 9. could      | b. broad   |
| 3. height    | c. palm   | 10. though    | c. brooch  |
| 4. chief     | d. people | 11. thought   | d. coin    |
| 5. sieve     | e. plaid  | 12. through   | e. food    |
| 6. father    | f. raise  | 13. touch     | f. good    |
| 7. batter    | g. said   | 14. toil      | g. kraut   |
| 15. bear     | a. bier   | 22. Aaron     | a. barrel  |
| 16. heard    | b. choir  | 23. bury      | b. borrow  |
| 17. near     | c. course | 24. cowardice | c. burrow  |
| 18. sergeant | d. far    | 25. fury      | d. Europe  |
| 19. wire     | e. hair   | 26. hurry     | e. floury  |
| 20. ore      | f. tour   | 27. laurel    | f. hearken |
| 21. sure     | g. word   | 28. market    | g. herring |

23. Write the phonemic symbol for the vowel sound you use in each of the following words:

- |           |           |           |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. bad    | 11. bed   | 21. pith  | 31. group | 41. harm  |
| 2. walk   | 12. scene | 22. son   | 32. ought | 42. war   |
| 3. talc   | 13. fete  | 23. rock  | 33. rough | 43. air   |
| 4. palm   | 14. head  | 24. cloth | 34. dough | 44. fern  |
| 5. calf   | 15. bead  | 25. roam  | 35. pull  | 45. ear   |
| 6. raid   | 16. great | 26. broad | 36. pun   | 46. heard |
| 7. plaid  | 17. meet  | 27. sloe  | 37. truth | 47. peer  |
| 8. said   | 18. beige | 28. shoe  | 38. gull  | 48. bird  |
| 9. mauve  | 19. key   | 29. foot  | 39. build | 49. poor  |
| 10. fraud | 20. they  | 30. sloop | 40. myth  | 50. turn  |

24. Write the phonemic symbols for the vowel sequences (diphthongs) you use in the following words:

- |          |           |          |         |           |
|----------|-----------|----------|---------|-----------|
| 1. aisle | 3. eye    | 5. soil  | 7. pout | 9. boy    |
| 2. kraut | 4. slight | 6. bough | 8. cow  | 10. style |

## THE SPELLING OF CONSONANT PHONEMES

/b/

*bad, tabard, gabble, gable, Babel, rob, robe, ebb; cupboard, bhang*

/d/

*dot, body, bode, model, poodle, puddle, bad, odd, loathed; dhوتي, Gandhi, bdellium*

## COMMENTS:

1. As a suffix /d/ is, except in *laid, paid, and said*, written *ed* after voiced sounds other than /d/ itself, as in *nabbed, nagged, craved, bathed, crazed, garaged, caged, shammed, joined, banged, called, cared, clawed, sowed, played, and pried*. The *ed* suffix symbolizes /ɪd/ after /d/, as also after the voiceless dental /t/. *Made* and *had* show the result of loss of earlier /k/ (in *maked*) and /v/ (in *haved*). Compare “/t/,” Comment 4.

2. The sequence /dz/ is written *zz* in *mezzo* (also with /ts/).

/g/

*go, sluggard, bagel, beg, egg; guard, guess, guilt, ghost, aghast, vogue, fatigue, mortgage, blackguard*

## COMMENTS:

1. In words with earlier *-logue*, American spelling frequently has *-log*, as in *catalog* and *epilog*, though many Americans continue to use the earlier spellings.

2. The sequence /gz/ is written *x* in *exist* and *exalt* and *xh* in *exhaust* and *exhilarate*.

3. The sequence /gʒ/ is written *x* in *luxurious*.

/p/

*pat, apology, apple, hop, hope; Lapp, gripppe, hiccough*

/t/

*ten, biter, baton, bitter, bite, butt, hoped; cigarette, Thomas, ptomaine, receipt, debt, indict, victuals, veldt, phthisis, Connecticut*

## COMMENTS:

1. In some loan-words with *th*, the *h* was inserted long ago by pseudo-scholars, not to be blamed overmuch at this late date for their tinkering with English spelling; in others, the *th* is a transliteration of Greek theta. In any case, non-English words with *th*—words not written with *þ* or *ð* in Old English, for which

*th* was later substituted—were earlier pronounced with /t/. The pronunciation of *Thomas* with /t/ has remained completely unaffected despite its spelling, and that of *Esther* and *Theresa* relatively so. *Anthony* regularly has /θ/ in American English, but /t/ is still frequent in British English; the nickname *Tony*, thanks to its spelling, retains the original medial consonant of the full form *Anthony*. It is interesting to note that even when spelled *Antony*, as in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is frequently pronounced with /θ/; this pronunciation is undoubtedly due to the more frequent spelling of the name with *th*. *Thames* is both /tɛmz/ for the English river and /θɛmz/ for the estuary in Connecticut. In *author*, *anthem*, *theater*, *theme*, and a few other words with earlier /t/, the *th* spelling has resulted in a pronunciation with /θ/ in both British and American English, as it is beginning to do for *thyme*. See also below “/θ/,” Comment 2.

2. The English use a spelling pronunciation for *Connecticut* with /kt/. In view of the naive American mispronunciation of many English proper names, this is not at first surprising. What is surprising, however, is that no matter how often an American in sophisticated English company may use the word with its traditional American pronunciation (with medial /t/) his English friends invariably come back with /kt/. Even though such place names are American, the English *know* how they ought to be pronounced. Cultured Americans endeavor to pronounce *Cholmondeley* and *Thames* in the English fashion, but the English almost invariably stick to their medial /kt/ in *Connecticut*, as also to their medial /č/ in *Michigan*, no matter how often they may have heard the traditional American pronunciation with medial /š/. It's the way they do it, and thus it's “right.” Incidentally, *Chicago* with initial /č/ is by no means uncommon in the Mother Country.

3. The sequence /ts/ is written *z* in *schizophrenia* and in *Mozart*. For the same sequence written *zz*, see above, “/d/,” Comment 2.

4. As a past suffix to verbs ending in voiceless sounds other than /t/ itself, /t/ is written *ed*, as in *stopped*, *stocked*, *staffed*, *frothed*, *tossed*, *washed*, and *watched*.

/k/

*kin*, *kind*, *ken*, *keen*, *naked*, *back*, *mackerel*, *ink*, *trek*, *can*, *cone*, *cute*, *fecund*, *music*, *sumac*, *tobacco*, *tic*, *havoc*, *arc*; *chemistry*, AE *schedule*, *school*, *machination*, *stomach*, *epoch*, *quoin*, *piquet*, *sacque*, *queue*, *unique*, *chukker*, *khaki*, *Xhosa*

## COMMENTS:

1. In final position *c* occurs mostly in *-ic*, which in such words as *music*, *physic*, and *critic* used to be written *-ick*. After a consonant final *c*, as in *talc*, *zinc*, and *arc*, it is quite rare.

2. The *ch* spellings for /k/ occur mostly in Greek and Greco-Latin loan-words and in a few words from languages other than Greek and Latin, for instance,

Irish *leprechaun*, Italian *maraschino* (sometimes naively pronounced with medial /ʃ/), and Italian *chiaroscuro*. For *schedule*, as everyone must know by now, British English has initial /ʃ/, which is as unjustifiable on historical grounds as the American pronunciation with the initial sequence /sk/. The word comes to us from Middle English *sedule*, borrowed from Old French and not directly from Latin at all, let alone Greek. The *ch* spelling is mere orthographic gingerbread.

3. The sequence /ks/ is written *x*, as in *mix* and *pixy*, or *xe*, as in BE *axe* and BE *annexe* (n.).

4. The sequence /kw/ is written *qu*, as in *queen* and *sequence*. See “/w/,” Comment 1.

5. The sequence /kʃ/ is written *xi*, as in *obnoxious*, and *cti*, as in *action*.

6. Before *a*, *o*, and (except for a few words like *skull*, *skunk*, and *kudos*) *u*, /k/ is written *c*, as in *calf*, *cane*, *care*, *calm*, *cob*, *come*, *cord*, *cone*, *cow*, *cub*. This is also true, in most cases, before *l* and *r*, as in *clean* and *crease*. Exceptions are limited to words whose complete naturalization is for one reason or another open to question, such as *klaxon*, (*Ku*) *Klux Klan*, *kleptomania*, and *kraut*.

/v/

*van*, *over*, *love*; *of*, *Ifor*, *rev*, *Stephen*, *schwa* (occasionally)

#### COMMENTS:

1. The *ph* of *nephew* represents an early Modern English attempt to make an Old French loan-word, *neveu*, look more erudite. The historical pronunciation with /v/ is usual, though not universal, in British English.

2. *Of* is the unstressed form of *off*, which helps to account for the spelling of /v/ with *f*.

3. Final *v*, as in *rev*, *spiv*, and *Slav*, is quite rare.

/ð/

*than*, *other*, *bathe*; *eth*, *eistedfodd*, *edh*, *y<sup>e</sup>*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The phoneme /ð/ is rare in initial position, occurring among commonly used words only in *the*, *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *they*, *their(s)*, *them*, *then*, *there*, *though*, *than*, and *thus*. The only other occurrences in this position are in the bookish words *thence* and *thither* (the latter frequently spoken, when it is spoken at all, with initial /θ/) and the archaic pronominal forms *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, and *thine*.

2. The *y* in pseudo-archaic *Ye Olde Grogge Shoppe* and similar barbarities represents a late form of *þ*. The word *ye* here (more properly *y<sup>e</sup>* or with the small *e* directly over the *y*) is thus simply a spelling for *the*, but is, alas, usually pronounced /ji/ as if it were the same as the old second-person plural pronominal form *ye*. In olden times *that* also was frequently written *y<sup>t</sup>* or *y<sup>t</sup>*.



3. *Edh* is an alternative spelling for *eth*, the name of crossed *d* (*ð*). It is recorded in dictionaries, but is not much used by scholars nowadays, who prefer *eth*.

4. In old-fashioned speech, cultured or folk, the *th* of *clothes* had no phonetic significance, the word being pronounced /kloz/. Nowadays, however, /kloðz/ is frequently heard; pseudo-refined speakers try hard to say it, particularly those who extol the wonder-working powers of powdered soaps and detergents over radio and television.

/z/

zeal, fez, fizzle, ooze, fuzz, advertise, is, visage, ridges, bags; possess, xylophone, raspberry

#### COMMENTS:

1. After voiced sounds other than /z/, /ž/, and /j/, the suffix *s* (usually *es* after *o*, as in *tomatoes*, and after the *i* that replaces *y* preceded by a consonant, as in *tries*) symbolizes /z/, as in *stabs*, *girls*, *runs*, and *dies*. After /z/, /ž/, and /j/, as also after the corresponding voiceless /s/, /š/, and /č/, the suffix written *es* symbolizes /ɪz/ or /əz/, as in *phrases*, *garages*, *badges*, *passes*, *ashes*, and *itches*.

2. For the sequence /gz/ written *x* and *xh*, see “/g/,” Comment 2.

/ž/

azure, brazier, pleasure, vision, equation; fission (as sometimes spoken), bijou, genre, rouge

#### COMMENTS:

1. The phoneme /ž/, which is not native to English, occurs mainly in loan-words of long standing, but only in medial position. Consequently the linguistically naive have difficulty with it when it occurs in recent loan-words from French in initial or final position, as in *genre*, *garage*, *rouge*, and *prestige*, which for such speakers may have /j/.

2. Many speakers of British English anglicize the recent French loan-word *garage*, pronouncing it to rime with Old French loans like *marriage* and *carriage*.

3. In view of the preceding comments, it is ironic that /ž/ should be gaining ground in all positions in the more or less artificial usage of actors, commentators, and others who speak to the public ear. In such speech one may hear it at the end of *liege* (particularly from actors in historical dramas, for the word is rarely heard in contemporary speech); medially in *rajah* and *cashmere*, and finally in *Taj (Mahal)*, all three Indic words; and medially in *adagio* (though Italian, the language from which the word comes, has /j/). There is of course no historical justification for any of these pronunciations. Of the words cited, only *liege* is of French provenience; but it has been part of the English word stock since the thirteenth century and is thus as well established as *marriage*.

4. For the sequence /gž/, see “/g/,” Comment 3.

/f/

*feed, chief, sheaf, self, serf, rifle, chaff, chafe; soften, rough, physis, sphinx, seraph, BE lieutenant /lefténənt/*

## COMMENTS:

1. The *ph* spellings occur usually, but not inevitably, in words that are ultimately Greek.
2. In a few Slavic names well known to speakers of English, /f/ is written *v*, as in *Chekhov* and *Kharkov*, or *w*, as in *Paderewski* and *Stokowski*.

/θ/

*thing, author, forth; phthalein, chthonian*

## COMMENTS:

1. Not many people bother to pronounce /θ/ for the *th* in *asthma*, which first appeared in English in the fourteenth century as *asma* and *asmy*, or of *isthmus* either; but some try.
2. In *Chatham, Waltham, Eltham, Gotham*, and the like, the *t* marks the end of a syllable, *-ham* (with *h* lost because of lack of stress) heading the second syllable in traditional pronunciation. Except for *Chatham* and *Eastham*, which always have /t/, American speakers pronounce such words as though the *t* and the *h* were in the same syllable, that is, with /θ/. British English varies in *Waltham*, traditionally /wɒltəm/, and *Eltham* /eltəm/, but has only /t/ in *Gotham* /gɒtəm/, in sharp contrast to the same word used as a nickname for New York City (/goθəm/). Daniel Jones says in his *English Pronouncing Dictionary* that "some new residents" have /θ/ in *Waltham*, warning that in telephoning from a distance it is the better part of wisdom to forget one's respect for tradition and say /wɒlθəm/, since there is a town named Walton in the same county.
3. If the Greek loan-word *chthonian* were less rare, it is likely that spelling-pronouncers would make an effort to pronounce the word as they fancied its spelling indicated. Most, however, who have had occasion to use the word thus far have pronounced it with initial /θ/. It is similar with the *ph* of *phthalein*, which is pronounced by those who have occasion to do so with initial /θ/.

/s/

*say, us, muss, massive, plaster, tense, tops, civil, acid, since, ice, choice; science, descent, schism, façade, psalm, Tucson*

## COMMENTS:

1. Before front vowels in loan-words, *c* may be a spelling for /s/, as in the words cited above. In both native words and loan-words *ce* may occur in final position, as *since, ice* (native) and *fence, choice* (loan).
2. The spelling *x* for the sequence /ks/ has been cited in another connection

(“/k/,” Comment 3). The unconventional use of *x* as a spelling of this sequence has enjoyed a considerable vogue in recent years, as in *sox* (for *socks*) and *Jax* (for *Jacksonville* [Florida]); the “tricky” appeal of the letter *x* is indicated by its use in many trade names ending in *-ex* and *-ox*.

3. The editors of the *OED*, the relevant section of which was published in 1909, thought that the *ps* of recent English loan-words from Greek (not old ones like *psalm* and *psalter*, which occur in Old English times) should be pronounced /ps/, the common reduction of the Greek sequence to /s/ being in their opinion an “unscholarly practice.” There are indeed a few speakers of British English who heed this admonition, but most speakers on both sides of the Atlantic eschew such phonological acrobatics (as far as English is concerned) and pronounce recent loans like *psyche* and *pseudo* with simple /s/.

/ʃ/

*short*, *marshal*, *trash*; *chute*, *machine*, *cache*, *condition*, *tension*, *sure*, *schist*, *pressure*, *mission*, *special*, *luscious*, *fashion*, *crustacean*, *crescendo*, *fuchsia*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The British place names *Evesham* and *Lewisham* are compounds, with *h* heading the second element, *ham*. They are now pronounced as if the *s* and the *h* were in the same syllable, that is, with /ʃ/. For the similar treatment of *t* and *h*, see “/θ/,” Comment 2.

2. For the sequence /kʃ/, written *x* and *cti*, see “/k/,” Comment 5.

/h/

*hale*; *who*, *José*, (Don) *Quixote*

#### COMMENTS:

1. *Junta* has been regarded as an English word since the seventeenth century, with initial /j/, but is now pronounced by fancy speakers with initial /h/, with the vowel re-Hispanicized as /u/. There is considerably more excuse, from a chronological point of view, for the initial /h/ in Californian place names like (*La*) *Jolla* and (*San*) *José* (written in American English with or without the acute accent). For the Spanish phoneme /h/, see Chapter 1, p. 11.

2. The comparatively newfangled school-Spanish pronunciation of *x* as /h/ in *Quixote*, which used to be /kwiksət/ in English speech, has not as yet affected the adjective *quixotic*; but give it time.

3. In the Old French loan-words *hour*, *honor*, *honest*, *heir(ess)*, BE *hostler*, and usually in AE *herb*, the *h* has no phonetic significance. *Humor* wavers between pronunciation with and without /h/, as does BE *hotel*. Pronunciation of *humble* without /h/ is frequent in the American South.

4. In BE *Birmingham* /bɜːmɪŋəmə/, BE *Buckingham* /bʌkɪŋəmə/, and other proper names in *-ham*, the *h* has no phonetic significance. American English pronounces

the *h*, giving secondary stress to the final syllables of such words except in such disyllables as *Durham* and *Fordham*. The *h* of *Amherst* is frequently not pronounced, though /æmhɜːst/ may be heard on both sides of the Atlantic.

5. Only when stressed, as at the beginning of an utterance, does /h/ occur in the personal pronouns *he*, *his*, *him*, and *her*. The practice of indicating this /h/-lessness by an apostrophe, as in "I told 'im so," is intended to indicate nonstandard or sloppy speech, though actually it does nothing of the sort. It is similar with *have* as an auxiliary: "would of gone" in written dialogue tells us absolutely nothing of the speaker's pronunciation (intended to indicate his cultural status), since in such constructions all native speakers normally pronounce *have* exactly like *of*.

6. Though /h/ does not usually or normally head an unstressed syllable, over-careful speakers, guided by spelling, sometimes manage to pronounce it in *vehement*, *vehicle*, *Fahey*, *Leahy*, and the like.

7. In addition to *who* (*whom*, *whose*), *wh* symbolizes /h/ only in *whole*, *whore*, and the compound *whooping cough*. The word *whoop* often has /h/, but pronunciation with /hw/ (or /w/ for the many speakers who lack this sequence) is common, as also in *whoopee*.

8. For the sequence /hj/, see "/u/," Comment 4.

/j/

*jean*, *major*, *gene*, *gorge*, *George*, *surgeon*, *region*, *regiment*, *badge*, *budget*, *suggest*, *exaggerate*, *educate*, *grandeur*, *soldier*; *spinach*, BE *Greenwich*, BE *Norwich*, *raj*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The phoneme /j/ is written *j* before all vowel phonemes. Before /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /ɜ/, and /a/ it is also written *g*, as in *genial*, *gist*, BE *gaol*, *gem*, *germ*, and *giant*. *Gaol* is the only instance of /j/ written *g* before /e/; it alternates in British English with the spelling *jail*, which alone is current in American English.

2. The phoneme does not occur initially in any native English word; not one of the examples cited comes to us from Old English times.

3. The pronunciation of *di* as /j/, as in *soldier*, used to be current in other words with *di*, for instance *Indian*, *idiot*, and *odious*. British English still has medial /j/ in *immediate*, and old-fashioned American English still has it in *tedious*.

4. Pronunciation of *suggest* as /səgʒɛst/ is usual in American English, but only /səjɛst/ is widely current in British English. Henry Bradley, from 1915 to 1923 senior editor of the *OED* (then called the *New English Dictionary*), noted having heard "a highly intelligent working-class orator pronounce the word *suggest* as 'sug-jest'" (cited by G. H. McKnight, *Modern English in the Making* [New York, 1928], p. 568). According to current observation, this pronunciation is still

regarded as a "working-class" pronunciation in England. It has not always been so: John Walker, an English actor, elocutionist, and author of *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791), was of the impression that "the most correct speakers generally preserve the first and last *g* in their distinct and separate sounds," though he goes on to cite three distinguished orthoepists who "pronounce the *g* in both syllables soft, as if written *sud-jest*," by which he means /səʒjést/.

/č/

*chat*, *achieve*, *rich*, *bachelor*, *Pritchard*, *catch*, *Christian*, *stature*, *luncheon*, *niche*; *cello*, *vermicelli*, *Czech*, BE *Marjoribanks* /mačbæŋks/ (also /maš-/)

/m/

*make*, *clamor*, *hammer*, *rim*, *time*; BE *programme*, *comb*, *plumber*, *damn*, *column*

/n/

*new*, *diner*, *din*, *dine*, *inn*, *banns*, *dinner*; *know*, *gnaw*, *sign*, *pneumonia*, *mnemonic*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The medial sequence /nj/ occurs in *union*, *canyon*, *piñon*, and, written *gn*, in a few French and Italian words taken into English during the Modern English period, for example, French *mignon* (but compare its doublet *minion*, with anglicized spelling), *chignon*, and *cognac* and Italian *monsignor* and *lasagna*.

2. The *ng* of *something*, *nothing*, and present participles (as in *hunting* and *fishing*) is frequently pronounced /n/. Such pronunciation is by no means confined to uncultivated speech, though it is popularly supposed to be, even by those who, while deploring it, sometimes unwittingly use it themselves in natural, running speech.

3. Pronunciation of *government* with loss of /n/ in the second syllable is by no means nonstandard, but to the contrary quite usual in cultivated speech, both American and English.

/ŋ/

*linger*, *uncle*, *sink*, *hanker*, *sing*, *hanger*, *among*; *banquet*, *minx*, *conch* /kaŋk/, *tongue*, *handkerchief*, BE *charabanc*, BE *Altrincham*, BE *restaurant*, Pago Pago /paŋo paŋo/

#### COMMENTS:

1. In *handkerchief* the /d/ that once intervened between /n/ and /k/ has been lost, bringing earlier /n/ and /k/ together with resultant velarization of the /n/ to /ŋ/.

2. There are British pronunciations of *restaurant* other than the one indicated above, including that most usual in American English. Those who have “had” French may end the word with a nasalized /ɔ/ or /a/.

/l/

*lease, repel, felon, fellow, doll, dole; Lloyd, llama, Miln(e), kiln*

#### COMMENTS:

1. Initially *ll* occurs mainly in Welsh names like *Lloyd, Llanelly*, and *Llandudno*, in which it represents an un-English sound represented by such makeshift spellings as *Cloyd* and *Floyd* (for *Lloyd*, common as an American personal name) and by Shakespeare’s *Fluellen* (for *Llewellyn*). The English sometimes try hard to pronounce /θl/ (also inaccurate) for the *ll* in Welsh names, but the game is hardly worth the candle; for one whose native tongue lacks this sequence, a verbal athletic feat is involved, and even if one accomplishes it successfully, one has made no more than a polite bow in passing to Welsh phonology.

2. The same doubling of *l* occurs initially in *llama*, ultimately a Quechuan (Incan) word, transmitted to English by way of Spanish. It is usually pronounced unpretentiously as /lamə/, but /jamə/ may occasionally be heard from those who are proud of their school Spanish.

3. In *folk, walk, half*, and *should*, and a few other words, the *l* ceased long ago to have any phonetic significance. Because of their modern spellings, *fault* and *vault* have come to be pronounced regularly with /l/ though the letter *l* was erroneously inserted in both words by classically trained putterers. Swift’s rime “O, let him not debase your thoughts,/ Or name him but to tell his faults” (“Directions for Making a Birth-Day Song,” 1729) was a perfect one for his day. Many younger speakers in our own day, it should be noted, try hard to get an /l/ before /m/ in *palm, balm, psalm, salmon*, and *almond*. For the rationale of *l* in such words, consult a dictionary.

4. The *n* of *Miln(e)* and *kiln* ceased to be pronounced in Middle English times, but, because the letter was retained in the spelling, these words are nowadays frequently pronounced with final /n/.

/r/

*red, cart, carom, bar, are, marry, err; write, hemorrhage, catarrh, rhetoric*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The *wr* of *write, wrong*, and a few other words so written represents an older sequence /wr/. The /w/ was lost long ago, but we continue to write it just as if it were still with us.



2. The loss of /r/ before consonants and in final position in an utterance has been alluded to in other connections. This loss occurs in Standard British English and in some regional varieties spoken in the eastern part of England. In American English (except in eastern New England, New York City, and the coastal South), as well as in the English of Scotland and Ireland, /r/ is regularly preserved.

3. An unwritten /r/—so-called intrusive *r*—as in *law* /r/ and *order* has been previously alluded to on p. 1. Although those who do not have it may be scornful of it, or at best indulgently amused by it, this unetymological /r/ may be heard at the highest levels of British and American life. It occurs principally in the speech of those who have /r/ only before vowels. Such speakers have “linking *r*” in such phrases as *harder and harder*, in which the only /r/ is that between *harder* and *and*; this linking /r/ provides the pattern for intrusive /r/.

/j/

*y*et, *y*ea, *y*ear, *y*e, *y*ou, *y*on, stallion; canyon, BE *bouillon*, (La) *Jolla*, BE capercailzie, hallelujah

#### COMMENTS:

1. The distribution of /ju/ after consonants has been discussed under “/u/,” Comments 2 and 3, where various spellings have been listed.

2. The phoneme /j/ is not represented graphically in *use*, *unite*, *eugenic*, *ewe*, and a number of other words.

3. In Hebrew *hallelujah* and a few German words current in English, mostly proper names like *Jung* and BE *jaeger* ‘fabric for hygienic underclothes, named for the inventor,’ /j/ is written *j*, as also in Danish *Jespersen*. Equally rare spellings are the *ll* of (La) *Jolla*, a Californian Spanish place name, and the *ill* of *bouillon*, though in this word most Americans pronounce an /l/ before the /j/. In *capercailzie* ‘Scottish wood grouse’ /kəpərkéljɪ/, the *z* was originally a printer’s mistake for *3*, a form of *g* that continued to be written in Scotland long after the English had given it up. The same makeshift *z* also occurs in *Menzies* and *Dalziell*, which have acquired spelling pronunciations (or more accurately, misspelling pronunciations).

4. For the sequence /nj/, see “/n/,” Comment 1, and “/u/,” Comment 2.

/w/

*woo*, *which* (see Comment 3); languish, question, *suede*, *ouija*, *Oaxaca*, *huarache*, *Juan*

#### COMMENTS:

1. The spellings *gu*, *qu*, and *su* in the cited words represent, respectively, the sequences /gw/, /kw/, and /sw/. These spellings occur in words from Latin

and French. But native English *queen*, *quean*, *quake*, *quaver*, *quell*, *quick*, and *quoth* have all been affected by French orthographic practice; all were written with *cw* in Old English times.

2. The un-English sequence /pw/ occurs, with the writing *pu*, only in *pueblo*, *Puerto (Rico)*, an alternative pronunciation of *puissance* (and *puissant*) as /pwisəns/ (and /pwisənt/), and the now rare *poilu*.

3. For many speakers the writing *wh* represents a voiceless labiovelar semivowel, written as [w] or as an upside-down *w* by phoneticians. Most phonemicists write it /hw/, as if it were a sequence. It is very rare in Standard British English, and many Americans lack it also. For those who do not have it, *why*/*Wye*, *which*/*witch*, *whine*/*wine*, *whale*/*wail*, and a few other such pairs are pronounced exactly alike, so that for such speakers *wh* is simply a writing for /w/. School-Spanish *Juan* may also begin with /hw/ in the speech of those who do not have simply /w/.

4. In *one* and *once*, /w/ is not represented graphically. (For *choir* /kwair/, see “/aɪ/,” Comment 1.)

5. The *w* has no phonetic significance in *two*, *who* (and a few other words cited under “/h/,” Comment 7), *sword*, and *answer*, nor in a number of British place names, in which *w* heads an unstressed final syllable, for instance, *Harwich*, *Keswick*, *Fenwick*, *Chiswick*, *Southwark*, and *Southwell* (the last two with /ʌ/ in the stressed syllables).

6. In recent French loan-words the spelling *oi* symbolizes /wa/, as in *soiree*, *memoir*, and *boudoir*.

## Exercises

25. Write the phonemic symbols for the consonant sounds you use in pronouncing the following words. For example, *stop* /s, t, p/ and *national* /n, ʃ, n, l/.

- |              |              |               |             |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1. mother    | 14. pleasure | 27. Lincoln   | 40. corps   |
| 2. phrase    | 15. honor    | 28. cupboard  | 41. hustle  |
| 3. though    | 16. hope     | 29. talk      | 42. knot    |
| 4. bath      | 17. George   | 30. whose     | 43. listen  |
| 5. bathe     | 18. chinchy  | 31. plumber   | 44. sword   |
| 6. sick      | 19. sing     | 32. psalm     | 45. column  |
| 7. six       | 20. linger   | 33. sign      | 46. chicken |
| 8. Thomas    | 21. chorus   | 34. desire    | 47. loss    |
| 9. pass      | 22. Waterloo | 35. mortgage  | 48. lose    |
| 10. pause    | 23. farewell | 36. weight    | 49. loose   |
| 11. vote     | 24. yelp     | 37. pneumonia | 50. prove   |
| 12. through  | 25. choir    | 38. aisle     | 51. wrong   |
| 13. Buddhist | 26. thumb    | 39. half      | 52. gnaw    |

26. Write in conventional spelling the words transcribed below:

- |         |          |          |             |                |
|---------|----------|----------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. lɒn  | 11. spɑt | 21. plʌm | 31. əʃɪv    | 41. pʌnɪʃ      |
| 2. lɔŋ  | 12. spɪt | 22. plʌm | 32. əpɒz    | 42. θraɪvɪŋ    |
| 3. lɒn  | 13. spɑt | 23. kʌd  | 33. dələɪt  | 43. sʌmən      |
| 4. tæŋ  | 14. ɪʃ   | 24. kʌd  | 34. səraʊnd | 44. mɪnəməm    |
| 5. tæŋk | 15. ɪʃ   | 25. pʌt  | 35. dɒvɪʒən | 45. mʃʊtəbəl   |
| 6. tæn  | 16. ɛʃ   | 26. pʊt  | 36. feɪbəl  | 46. kʌmbəneʃən |
| 7. tʌŋ  | 17. ek   | 27. nʌk  | 37. fɪbəl   | 47. fæntæstɪk  |
| 8. fɜm  | 18. ʧɜʃ  | 28. maʊs | 38. fɔɪbəl  | 48. mekənəɪz   |
| 9. fem  | 19. ʃʌʃ  | 29. əks  | 39. trɪpəl  | 49. lɪbərəɪzəm |
| 10. fom | 20. kɔɪl | 30. æks  | 40. sɪmbəl  | 50. zɑɪləfən   |

27. Write each of the following words in phonemic transcription.

- |           |           |              |              |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. knees  | 6. poll   | 11. thrive   | 16. million  |
| 2. niece  | 7. pollen | 12. quotes   | 17. merchant |
| 3. change | 8. stewed | 13. joined   | 18. lesson   |
| 4. pal    | 9. stood  | 14. crouched | 19. fission  |
| 5. pall   | 10. stud  | 15. melon    | 20. vision   |

28. Write the following sentences in phonemic transcription. Remember that many words are pronounced one way in isolation, but another when combined with other words into a sentence.

1. She met a robber that wanted to rob her.
2. Does she have to have two?
3. Buddy tried all winter to be a winner, but he wasn't.
4. Why did he call his goldfish Whitey?
5. The cowboy's hoping when they open the rodeo he can rope them.
6. The dog and cat are good and dirty, top and bottom.
7. He would have liked the wood of the oak tree.
8. What is your problem, with the clutch or brake?

# 4

## VOCABULARY

When most of us think about language, we think first about words. Thus, the hardest part of learning a foreign language may seem to be memorizing its vocabulary; when we observe a child first acquiring speech, we talk of his progress as a matter of learning new words. We are also likely to feel that the adult speaker with the largest vocabulary has the best command of English. To think of a language as just a stock of words is, however, quite wrong. Words alone do not make a language; a grammar is needed to combine them in some intelligible way. Moreover, words are relatively easy to learn, and indeed all of us go on learning them all our lives. They are also the least stable part of language. Words come into being, change their pronunciations and meanings, and disappear completely—all with comparative ease. Yet it is true that the vocabulary is the focus of language. It is in words that sounds and meanings interlock to allow us to communicate with one another, and it is words that we arrange together to make sentences, conversations, and discourse of all kinds. Thus we have a paradox in that the most ephemeral part of language is also the center where meaning, pronunciation, and grammar come together.

### SIGNS

When we say that words have meaning, we are saying that they are a kind of sign. Signs are of many sorts. A red traffic light is a sign to stop. A thunder-

cloud is a sign that it may rain. A ringing bell is a sign that a class hour is beginning or ending. A black arm band is a sign of mourning. The mark  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$  is a sign of a square root. In each case we have one thing, the **expression** (red light, cloud, bell, black band,  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$ ), which stands for or calls to mind something else, the **content** (stopping, rain, class change, mourning, square root). Together expression and content make up a sign, which is therefore not a thing, but rather an association or relationship between two things, one we perceive and one we infer.

In language the signs have pronunciation or spelling for their expression and meanings for their content. As a linguistic sign, the word is neither sound nor meaning alone, but a relationship between the two. Thus, *man* is a word in English because it associates the sounds /mæn/ with meanings like 'adult male human being.' The sounds /plin/ are not a word because they have no associated meaning; and the notion 'fathers who have only one daughter' or 'men with a single female offspring' is not a word because there is no single expression associated with that meaning, although we can state it in various ways by using several words, as we have just done.

On the basis of how expression is related to content, we can distinguish three kinds of signs. First, there are **natural signs**, in which the relationship is one of cause and effect. When we see thunderclouds and decide that it is likely to rain, we reach our conclusion because we know the water vapor that makes up the clouds may condense and fall as rain. In natural signs expression has a causal relation to content. Men do not create such signs; they only interpret them. Second, there are **analogical** or **iconic signs**, in which the relationship between expression and content is one of real or imagined likeness. Red, as in the stoplight, represents danger and 'Stop!' because red is the color of blood and fire, and when we see either of these we know something may be wrong. There is a partial similarity between the color red and blood or fire, which in turn are associated with danger and the need to stop. Here the relationship is like that between a picture and the thing it represents. It is not inevitable, but neither is it completely arbitrary. Men create as well as interpret analogical signs, but imitation plays a part in the creating. Third, there are completely **arbitrary signs**, in which the relationship between expression and content involves no resemblance. There is no reason whatever for the mark  $\sqrt{\phantom{x}}$  to represent the notion 'square root.' There is no causal connection between the two things, nor does the mark imitate its meaning in any way. It is simply a matter of chance that we have agreed to associate that mark with the meaning.

Most words are arbitrary signs. There is no reason other than custom for us to associate the sounds /mæn/—rather than /ombre/, /anθropos/, or /iʃ/—with the meaning 'adult male human being.' English speakers just happen to do it that way. A few words, however, are analogical signs: the sound of *whoosh* is like a fast, rushing noise or movement; the sound of *plop*

is like something dropping into water; and the sound of *hiccup* is like the noise of the muscular spasm. Such words are called **echoic** or **onomatopoeic**, but their number is not really large in comparison with the entire vocabulary of English. There are no true natural signs used in language. The closest we come to a natural sign is a noise like laughter or groaning, but they are neither wholly natural nor really a part of language.

## Exercises

1. Is each of the following a natural sign, an analogical sign, or an arbitrary sign?
  1. a dollar sign: \$
  2. a sign for the moon in its first quarter: ☾
  3. nodding the head as a sign of agreement
  4. a nodding head as a sign of drowsiness
  5. the silhouette of a running child as a road sign for a school
  6. a falling thermometer as a sign of cold
  
2. Suggest several echoic words other than those mentioned in this chapter for the following:
  1. animal noises    2. kinds of movement    3. machine noises
  
3. Suppose *snouch* were a real word in English.
  1. What do you think might be an appropriate meaning for it—that is, what ideas does the pronunciation suggest to you?
  2. After you have written down a meaning, list as many words as you can think of that begin with *sn-*, and as many words as you can think of that end with *-ouch*.
  3. Do any of the words that begin or end like *snouch* have meanings like the one you invented? If so, can you assign a meaning (perhaps only a vague one) to either /sn/ or /avč/?

## MORPHEMES

So far we have been talking about words as though they were the basic signs in language. But that is not quite accurate. Words are signs, but so are some parts of words and also larger units, like phrases and clauses. In fact, any coherent meaning represented by a discrete signal in sound or



writing is a sign, no matter how small or large. The *Gettysburg Address* is a sign, as are the Book of Genesis, *War and Peace*, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In studying vocabulary, however, we are concerned not with large, complex signs like these, but rather with two types of signs that are both basic, although basic in different ways, namely, the morpheme and the idiom. Leaving the idiom until later, we will look first at the **morpheme**, which is usually defined as the smallest meaningful unit of language—a language sign (that is, an association of sound and meaning) that cannot be divided into smaller signs.

The word *mahogany* cannot be divided into any meaningful parts. We could of course divide its sound into *ma-* and *-hogany* or into *mahoga-* and *-ny*, but the parts would have no meaning themselves. Since *mahogany* cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts, it is a word made up of one morpheme. On the other hand, the word *girls* can easily be divided into *girl* and *-s*, meaning ‘more than one.’ Thus *girls*, although a single word, is made up of two morphemes.

Notice that morphemes are of various lengths. Some, like *girl*, are exactly one syllable long. Others, like *-s*, are smaller than a syllable. Still others, like *mahogany*, are several syllables long. You cannot tell from the length of a word how many morphemes it has in it. Since a word is a composite of sound and meaning, it will have as many morphemes as it has parts that are themselves such composites. Thus, *unlawfully* is a word of four morphemes because the pronunciation represented by its spelling and the meaning ‘in a manner not conforming to law’ can be divided together into exactly four parts: *-ly* ‘in a manner,’ *un-* ‘not,’ *-ful* ‘conforming to,’ and *law* ‘law.’ At first glance, you might suppose that *mandate* could be divided into two morphemes, *man* and *date*. A moment’s reflection, however, will tell you that although the sound of *mandate* can be divided in that way, the meaning cannot, and therefore the resemblance between the pronunciation of *mandate* and that of *man* and *date* is a coincidence. Since the meanings are quite different, the three items *man*, *date*, and *mandate* are unrelated to one another.<sup>1</sup>

There are several different kinds of morphemes. First we can distinguish **bases** and **affixes**. A base is a morpheme that stands alone as a word or to which other morphemes are added to make a word. Thus *mahogany*, *girl*, and *law* are bases. Affixes can be added before a base, in which case they are called **prefixes**, or after a base, in which case they are **suffixes**. Of the morphemes we have looked at so far, *-s*, *un-*, *-ful*, and *-ly* are all affixes.

We can also distinguish **free** and **bound morphemes**. A free morpheme is one that can stand alone as a word, whereas a bound morpheme normally

<sup>1</sup> *Mandate* can be divided, but its parts are *mand-* and *-ate*. The *mand-* part is to be seen also in *remand*, *command*, *demand*, *countermand* and is used as an independent word by psychologists like B. F. Skinner, *Verbal Behavior* (New York, 1957), pp. 35–51. The *-ate* part is a fairly common morpheme found, for example, in *precipitate*.

has to have some other item joined to it. All affixes are of course bound, since they rarely form words by themselves, but bases can be either bound or free. The bases we have seen so far have all been free, but bound ones are also fairly common. For example, the word *unkempt* has a prefix *un-*, which is the same affix we saw in *unlawfully*. However, taking off *un-* leaves *kempt* as the base. Since *kempt* never occurs alone as a word, it is a bound base. In fact, the only time it occurs is with *un-* before it, so it is not just bound, but uniquely bound. Historically, *kempt* is a variant of the word *combed*. In present-day English, however, we use *unkempt* to refer to any disarray of person, dress, or manner, and thus we have lost sight of the etymological meaning of the word. It is always a little hard to pin down the meaning of bound bases, but presumably nowadays *kempt* means whatever is characteristic of someone who is not unkempt. Other bound bases can be seen in *feckless* and *inept*.

The distinction between base and affix and between free and bound morphemes is not an absolute one. Because language is constantly changing, a particular morpheme may be transformed from a base to an affix or from a bound unit to a free one. The suffix *-ly*, which is historically related to the word *like*, was once itself an independent word, but now is a pure suffix. The item *-man*, pronounced /mən/ in *postman* or *Englishman*, is following the same path but has not yet developed so far. Most English speakers probably still think of it as a variation of the base morpheme *man*, but its altered pronunciation and special use are indications that it is on the way to becoming an affix distinct from the noun that is its origin. The opposite process, in which morphemes that were bound affixes become free bases, is also observable. The prefix *ex-* in *ex-wife* and *ex-husband* is now used informally as a word meaning 'ex-spouse,' as in *My ex and I get along now*. A similar independence has been conferred on the bound items *-ism* and *-ology*.<sup>2</sup>

## Exercises

4. Write the following words with hyphens between their morphemes.

- |               |              |                 |               |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. outside    | 5. waylay    | 9. slowly       | 13. sportsman |
| 2. quicksand  | 6. weaken    | 10. fourth      | 14. upstairs  |
| 3. worldwide  | 7. vicarage  | 11. standoffish | 15. indebted  |
| 4. wildflower | 8. poisonous | 12. steamroller | 16. hopefully |

5. Circle each bound morpheme in the following words.

- |             |               |             |              |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. duckling | 4. hemisphere | 7. pratfall | 10. dinosaur |
| 2. lemonade | 5. cranberry  | 8. tidbit   | 11. painting |
| 3. surname  | 6. island     | 9. polyglot | 12. reclose  |

<sup>2</sup>For the use of these items as words see Thomas Pyles, *The Origins and Development of the English Language* (New York, 1964), p. 274.

6. Write the following words with hyphens between morphemes. Above each morpheme write *B* if it is a base, *P* if a prefix, or *S* if a suffix.

- |                |                  |                   |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. afoot       | 5. unseasonable  | 9. sawbones       |
| 2. resolder    | 6. disheartening | 10. washerman     |
| 3. famous      | 7. hitchhike     | 11. flavorfulness |
| 4. cannibalism | 8. sandpaper     | 12. unbeheaded    |

## IDIOMS

Let us look now at another word that can be divided into morphemes: *blackboard*. It is clear to English speakers that this word is made of two parts: *black* and *board*; but imagine someone who, although he knows the separate morphemes and their meanings, has never seen them compounded with one another as a noun. If he suddenly comes across the word *blackboard* will he know what is meant? The answer is clearly “no.” Understanding the meanings of *black* and *board* is very little help in knowing that a blackboard is a slate-like surface of any dark color—nowadays often green—used for writing on with chalk. The compound has two parts that suggest its meaning but do not wholly account for it. Such an expression, a sign that is composed of morphemes but whose meaning cannot be predicted from its components, is called an **idiom**. Idioms are thus linguistic wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Idioms can be words, or phrases, or clauses. Besides *blackboard* there are word-idioms like *dumbwaiter*, *firetrap*, *milktoast*, *Methodist*, *understand*, *overcome*, *upright*, and *bygone*. Knowing the meanings of *under* and *stand* will not help much with *understand*, and the same is true of the other words. Idioms may also be phrases like *get along* ‘be friendly’ and *look out* ‘be careful’ or *a pig in a poke* and *a bull in a china shop*, as well as clauses like *He got out of the wrong side of the bed*, *Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched*, *A stitch in time saves nine*, and *It goes in one ear and out the other*.

Not all combinations of a verb and a particle are phrase-idioms, although many are. If you put down a package you are carrying, the expression *put down* seems to be fairly equivalent to its two parts, *put* ‘set, lay’ and *down* ‘to a lower place.’ If, however, you put down a revolt, something quite different is involved. Although the second *put down* is made of the same two morphemes, its meaning is ‘crush, quell.’ *To put down a package* involves two wholly distinct units *put* and *down*, whereas *to put down a revolt* involves an idiom with a single sense expressed by the combined morphemes.

Many clause-idioms are proverbs like *A rolling stone gathers no moss* or hackneyed expressions like *She gave him the bum’s rush*. Others are so colorless that we seldom think of them as idioms. Few English speakers would consider the expression *to take a walk* as in any way unusual or idiomatic, but if they

encounter the corresponding Spanish idiom *dar un paseo*, literally 'to give a walk,' they may realize that *taking* and *giving a walk* are equally idiomatic from the standpoint of the literal meaning of the verbs.

A special kind of word-idiom is made from the large number of bound bases and affixes that English acquired by borrowing many Latin words, for example, the following:

|         |          |         |        |          |         |         |
|---------|----------|---------|--------|----------|---------|---------|
| detain  | deceive  | deduce  | defer  | detract  | define  | deform  |
| contain | conceive | conduce | confer | contract | confine | conform |
| retain  | receive  | reduce  | refer  | retract  | refine  | reform  |

The repetition of the elements in these words leads us to say that each consists of two morphemes, even though we may have some difficulty in deciding the meaning of some of them. There are three prefixes *de-*, *con-*, and *re-*, and seven bases *tain*, *ceive*, *duce*, *fer*, *tract*, *fine*, and *form*. The base *form* is free, so we would have few qualms about dividing the words of the last column: *de-form*, *con-form*, *re-form*. If we have the analogy of the *form* words to help us, and if we know that *tain* ultimately comes from a Latin word meaning 'hold,' as well as that *de-* means 'from, away,' *con-* 'together, with,' and *re-* 'back, again,' we can begin to see *detain* as 'hold (someone) away (from something),' *contain* as 'hold (something) together,' and *retain* as 'hold (something) back.' All bound forms are something of a problem in their meanings, as we saw earlier in the case of *kempt*, but these bound bases from Latin are particularly difficult because most of them are found only in word-idioms and thus have no clearly isolable meaning.

Although the history of a word is not directly relevant to its place in our language or its present structure, the easiest way to reach a decision about how to divide such Latinate words and about the meanings of their component morphemes is to look them up in a dictionary. In the etymology for each word the dictionary will show what Latin bases and affixes it is built from, and they will normally be a reliable guide to the morphemic structure of the word in English.

## Exercises

7. Indicate which of the expressions is an idiom and which is a literal expression.

1. Everyone was dressed in *blues* and greens.
2. He has a case of the *blues*.
3. She looks good in that hair style because she has a *long face*.
4. Whenever she is disappointed she puts on a *long face*.
5. We baited the *rattrap* with cheese but didn't catch anything.

6. The hotel is a *rattrap*, but it's the only one in town.
  7. The new clothing styles will *grow on* you.
  8. Moss can *grow on* bare rock.
  9. He *burned the candle at both ends* because he wanted a lot of wax.
  10. He *burned the candle at both ends* by spending every night at discotheques.
8. Write the following words with hyphens between their morphemes.
- |             |               |              |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. inject   | 6. obtrude    | 11. reject   |
| 2. instruct | 7. obvert     | 12. revert   |
| 3. intrude  | 8. project    | 13. renounce |
| 4. invert   | 9. protrude   | 14. subject  |
| 5. obstruct | 10. pronounce | 15. subvert  |
9. The preceding exercise includes five prefixes and five bound bases, all derived ultimately from Latin. Find the etymological meanings of these ten morphemes in a dictionary.

## ALLOMORPHS

The morpheme, the smallest sign in language, has both a pronunciation and a meaning; or to be more exact, it is a minimum correlation between sound and sense. We will look at meaning in more detail in a later chapter, and we have already examined the separate sounds that make up pronunciation, but we still need to consider how sounds express a morpheme. The most important thing to be aware of is that one morpheme can have several pronunciations, which are called **allomorphs**. For example, the indefinite article is either *a*, when it comes before a consonant sound, or *an*, when it comes before a vowel sound. Since, however, both pronunciations represent the same word, we say that *a* and *an* are allomorphs (literally 'other-forms') of the same morpheme. They are merely variations in the way the same meaningful entity is realized in sound.

There are three main kinds of pronunciation variants, depending on what determines whether one pronunciation or another is to be used. In the case of *a* and *an*, the deciding factor is the context or environment of the morpheme, specifically what kind of sound, vowel or consonant, immediately follows it. Similarly, the morpheme *-s* that marks the plural of nouns has three different pronunciations that depend on what kind of sound comes immediately before it. When added to a word like *miss*, *quiz*, *wish*, *collage*, *batch*, or *college* that ends in one of the sibilant or "hissing" sounds /s, z,



š, ž, č, ĵ/, the *-s* ending is pronounced /ɤz/ or /ɪz/. When added to a word like *cap*, *rat*, *back*, *puff*, or *myth* that ends not in a sibilant, but in a voiceless /p, t, k, f, θ/, the *-s* is pronounced /s/. When added to any other word such as *cab*, *lid*, *bag*, *nerve*, *ball*, *pan*, or *toe* that ends in one of the remaining voiced sounds, *-s* is pronounced /z/.

Some morphemes, such as *wife*, have their pronunciation determined by the morphemes they are next to rather than by neighboring sounds. Thus the form *wife* changes to *wive-* when it is used with the plural ending as in *wives*. The noun *wife* thus has two forms, /waɪv/ used before the plural morpheme and /waɪf/ used in other positions. Quite similar is *house*, except that the difference in sound between the singular /haus/ and the plural /haʊz/ as in *houses* is not reflected in the spelling. There are many other examples of such variations in English. The verb *flee* /fli/ has a different vowel when the past tense ending *-d* follows: *fled* /flɛd/. The adjective *wide* /waɪd/ also has a different vowel when it is followed by the suffix *-th*, forming the abstract noun *width* /wɪdθ/, and often has a different consonant before the suffix as well, /wɪtθ/, although that change is not shown by the spelling. The pronunciation of /t/ in *width* instead of /d/ is the result of a process known as **assimilation**. When one sound assimilates to another, it becomes more like it. In the word *width* the /d/ is a voiced stop but the /θ/, spelled *th*, is a voiceless fricative. Because it is difficult to pronounce two such sounds together, one of them is likely to give way by adapting to the other; in this case the /d/ loses its voice, thereby becoming a /t/.

Although there is no difference in spelling, *nation* and *national* have different vowel sounds in the first syllable. Similarly, although the base is constant in spelling, *bombard* and *bomber* contain different forms of *bomb*, one with a /b/ pronounced after the /m/, and one without it.

All the allomorphic variations we have looked at so far are alike in that the context decides which allomorph is to be used. In some cases, surrounding sounds play the decisive role; and in other cases, particular morphemes in the environment. But in all these examples it is some aspect of the linguistic context that governs the variation. Some pronunciation differences, however, depend on the style of speech, whether familiar or formal, or on the general circumstances of talking. Under conditions that call for "careful, distinct" speech, *sandwich* may be pronounced as its spelling suggests /sændwɪç/, but frequently the word has no /d/ in it, and in quick-tempoed, casual speech the /n/ may be replaced by an /m/ and the /č/ by a /j/, giving /sæmwɪj/ as the result, a pronunciation that might be spelled impressionistically as "samwidge." Although that spelling is certainly illiterate, the pronunciation it represents is reasonably common in Standard English. It is an informal pronunciation, to be sure, but though seeming to lack elegance it is by no means ignorant. A similar word is *government*, which has its first *n* pronounced only in quite formal speech. Most of the time it is pronounced as though

spelled “government,” and has even less formal pronunciations suggested by “govment” and “gubment,” the latter favored by such a stylish, not to mention charismatic, speaker as Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York. All of us have different styles of language that include variant pronunciations ranging from casual to formal, from intimate to ritualistic.

In talking about a mediator in a labor strike, everyone is likely to pronounce the final syllable of *mediator* like that of *later*. But if the word occurs in the ritualistic language of prayer, many would pronounce the final vowel like that of *abhor*. There is a widespread feeling that the second pronunciation of the *-or* suffix is posher or more respectful. Those teachers who prefer to be called *educators* almost invariably pronounce the *-or* with the supposedly high-class vowel of *abhor*, as do politicians aspiring to the office of *legislator*. The normal pronunciation habits of English would give the suffixes *-er* and *-or* the same sound. The effort to distinguish them is probably the result of a false pride in knowing how to spell.

Somewhat different is *travail*, which is generally pronounced nowadays to rime with either *avail* or *have ale*, but which has a traditional pronunciation that makes the word sound exactly like *travel*. Historically, *travail* and *travel* are variants of the same original word, but the /trævəl/ pronunciation of *travail* is now restricted almost entirely to liturgical language, which often preserves archaic features of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Other words with stylistic variation in their pronunciation are *arctic*, with the first *c* normally silent, but pronounced in spelling-conscious styles of speech; *nuclear*, with a variant pronunciation that is suggested by the misspelling “nucular” and used by American presidents and five-star generals; and *of*, which in normal speech is pronounced either /əv/ or simply /ə/ as in *cup of coffee*. Stylistic variants such as these have already been discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 as questions of usage.

In addition to contextual and stylistic variants, there are regional ones. The pronunciation of a morpheme may vary from one part of the English-speaking world to another, as does *schedule*, which Americans pronounce with an initial /sk/, but other English speakers with /ʃ/. Even within one country, pronunciation varies greatly from one place to another. When you put grease on something, you probably /gris/ it if you are from the northern half of the United States and /griz/ it if you are from the southern half. The noun *grease* always ends in an *s* sound, but whether the verb is pronounced like it or ends in a *z* sound instead depends on where you learned your English.

There are many other words whose pronunciation varies from one place to another. Does *with* end like *tooth* or like *smooth*? Does *egg* have the vowel of *Ed* or of *aid*? Does *frog* have the vowel of *caught* or of *cot*, or do all three words perhaps have the same vowel? Does *catch* rime with *patch* or with *fetch*? Do *which* and *witch* sound alike or different? Does *shrimp* begin with the first sound of *shin* or the first sound of *sin*? The answers to all these questions



depend on where you grew up and who you first learned your English from. Quite respectable people use all the pronunciations, even though some may sound a bit odd if you are not used to them.

### Exercises

10. What pronunciation variants does your dictionary record for the following words? Do the variations seem to be contextual, stylistic, or regional?

1. the    2. to    3. Wednesday    4. forehead    5. corollary    6. creek

11. How is the past tense ending *-ed* pronounced for each group of the following verbs? Try to discover what determines the pronunciation used in each case.

1. heated, pitted, bloated, suited, beaded, aided, nodded, clouded  
 2. walked, hopped, watched, loafed, missed, frothed, flashed  
 3. begged, grabbed, wedged, roved, whizzed, breathed, roamed, planned, hanged, filled, poured, played, plowed, freed, dried, thawed

12. How may the word *and* be pronounced in each of the following phrases during casual, relaxed speech? What assimilation may take place?

1. up and down                      2. hide and seek                      3. back and forth

### ORIGINS OF THE VOCABULARY

How many words are there in English? That is a question no one can answer. A desk dictionary of the kind most college students use may have somewhere around 100,000 words listed in it. One of the large, so-called unabridged dictionaries may list over 500,000 words. But “unabridged” is a misleading word. All the term means is that the dictionary has not been shortened from some other dictionary. A very short dictionary of only a few thousand words would be “unabridged” if it were an original work, so it would be a mistake to think that an “unabridged” dictionary lists all the words of English. In fact it is not possible for anyone to count or to list all the words of any language—not merely because of their great number, but because those who use the language are constantly making new ones. It might be said that every dictionary is the dictionary of a dead language. No matter

how fast and how thorough a dictionary-maker may be, by the time he has gathered his words, written descriptions of them, and published his book, old words will have changed and new ones will have come into being. The language refuses to stay the same from year to year, or even from moment to moment; it is constantly in the process of becoming something different. Words have a life cycle. They come into existence; they change in sound and meaning; and they disappear. Now we will look at this life cycle of the vocabulary, beginning with some of the ways words come into existence.

From time to time men feel the need for a new word, either because they have something new to talk about or because they have grown dissatisfied with the words they already have. When the word-lust comes upon men, for whatever reason, they may satisfy it by making a new word or by borrowing one. **Borrowing** is a historically important source of new words for English speakers. From prehistoric times when our linguistic ancestors borrowed words like *street* from the Romans to the present century when we have adopted words like *sputnik* from the Russians, our political and social history is reflected in the words that have come to us from abroad. Moreover we have taken words from languages near and far: French, Japanese, Bantu, Polish, Polynesian, Greek, Arabic, Eskimo—the list is a long one. In spite of the importance of borrowing, no more will be said about it here. Loan-words are best considered as part of the general history of English and are thus dealt with in Chapter 9. Moreover in current English, words are not borrowed as often as they are made within the language.

New words can be made from scratch—the process is called **root-creation**—or they can be built out of existing vocabulary material. You might suppose that creating a word *ex nihilo* would be the easiest thing in the world, but in fact it is one of the most difficult. Indeed, the Latin saying *ex nihilo nihil fit* ‘nothing comes from nothing’ seems to be very nearly true when we look at the origins of our vocabulary. It is hard to find genuine words that were simply made up rather than made from other words. One such example may be *googol*, a term coined by the mathematician Edward Kasner to denote ten to the hundredth power or a number consisting of one followed by one hundred zeros. According to one story, Kasner asked a young relative what he would call such a large number, and the small boy answered, “Call it a googol.” Whether the story is true or not, the word *googol* does seem to have been created from no other words at all, its very root being arbitrarily coined.

More familiar examples of *ex nihilo* words are those usually called **echoic** or **onomatopoeic**, words whose pronunciation imitates a given sound. Here belong some bird names, like *bobolink* and *whippoorwill*; words denoting motion, like *whiz*, *crunch*, and *bash*; names for some bodily activities, like *hiccup*, *burp*, *slurp*, and *gulp*; terms denoting noises, like *tinkle*, *boom*, and *clang*; words for animal sounds, like *moo*, *purrr*, and *twitter*; and many other

similar words. Echoic words derive from nothing in the vocabulary, yet they are not altogether original, since they imitate sounds outside language. They are invented words, but they follow a model—namely, the sound they echo—albeit inexactly. These analogical words, whose pronunciation vaguely suggests their meaning, are common but, as we have already seen, not really typical of language.

A way of making words more common and more typical than arbitrary coinage or imitation is to join two or more words in a **compound**. Compounds, which are usually idioms with unpredictable meanings, are the favorite kind of new word in English and have been so throughout the long history of our language. Even during the Old English period before 1100, compounding was a much used way of making new words. For example, *leorning-hūs* ‘learning-house, school,’ *cyne-stōl* ‘king-chair, throne,’ *stæf-cræft* ‘letter-craft, grammar,’ and *fōt-bred* ‘foot-board, stirrup’ were compounds in Old English that have been lost; most of them were replaced by borrowed words. The last word, however, is an exception; the modern term *stirrup*, which we use instead of *foot-board*, comes from an Old English compound, *stig-rāp*, literally ‘mounting-rope.’ Modern English has quite a few **fused compounds**—words that began life as compounds, but whose parts have been so thoroughly fused that nowadays almost no one thinks of them as compounds. Another example is *ampersand*, the name for the symbol &, which was often printed at the end of the alphabet. When the alphabet was read off, the symbol & had to be called something, so it was read off as “and per se and,” that is, “(the symbol) & by itself (is to be read as) *and*.” Eventually, *and per se and* was fused into *ampersand* and those who used the term forgot that it was originally composed of several parts. We have some words in present-day English that are on their way to becoming fused compounds: *shepherd*, *breakfast*, *manifold*, *brimstone* (earlier *brin-*, that is, ‘burning,’ *stone*), and *tadpole* (literally, ‘toad poll or head’). As the pronunciation of these words becomes less and less like that of their original parts, English speakers will stop thinking of them as compounds. The words will then be single morphemes like *stirrup* or *don* (originally *do on*) or *hussy* (originally *house-wife*). Meanwhile we go on making new compounds all the time.

There are many different kinds of compounds; their differences are determined by the sort of words they are made from and by the relationship between the meaning of the compound and the meanings of its parts. One recently vogueish type consists of an uninflected verb and a noun, for example, *fry-pan*, *swimsuit*, and *think-tank* ‘a specialized group that solves problems and originates ideas.’ There is an older sort of compound, which also consists of a verb and a noun, but which is quite different from those just cited. Examples of the older compound are *pickpocket*, *toss-pot*, *marplot*, *cutthroat*, *scapegrace*, and *scarecrow*. Most of them are derogatory in meaning and many have an archaic tone, but the important difference between these and the

newer, more fashionable compounds is that there is a different relationship between the parts and the whole. Thus, while a *fry-pan* is a pan for frying, a *pickpocket* is decidedly not a pocket for picking; rather he is someone who picks pockets. The old compound usually names a person by telling what he does to a given thing; the newer compound names a thing and tells what it is used for.

In compounds, vocabulary and grammar are both involved because it is usually possible to paraphrase the compound as a grammatical phrase, for instance, *swimsuit* as *suit used for swimming* and *cutthroat* as *someone who cuts throats*. But compounds are units of the vocabulary and not of the grammar because their meanings differ in unpredictable ways from those of the corresponding grammatical phrases. A swimsuit, in fact, has little resemblance to what one would normally call a suit; a cutthroat may never actually sever necks; and a blackboard need not be a board that is black. Thus the correspondence between compounds and grammatical phrases is only partial, although it is useful for showing how compounds differ from one another.

There are many other kinds of compounds in English—too many to describe here, but we can briefly note one other that is especially voguish. This compound consists of a verb and a prepositional adverb—for example, *shut-out*, *lockout*, and *putout* ‘someone expelled from school’ (recently invented by analogy with *dropout*, but quite different from *output*, with the same morphemes in reverse). *Cookout* is also popular, as is *stakeout*, beloved of television detectives. Still another example is the plethora of compounds with *-in*. The *sit-in*, *wade-in*, and *teach-in* of the crusading civil-rights era have given way to the hippie *love-in* and *be-in*. Further variations include the *wed-in*, or *marry-in*, ‘a mass wedding, especially one involving couples who have already contracted common-law marriages’; the *fat-in* ‘gathering of overweight persons who are happy to be fat’; and the *swim-in*, which may be only a teenage swimming party. Once a compound of this sort becomes voguish, its newer variations are formed with great freedom and frequency.

We are sometimes uncertain about what is a single compound word, and what is a sequence of words. Spelling is not of much help because it is variable and often arbitrary. *Swimsuit* may be hyphenated (*swim-suit*), whereas the completely parallel *swim fin* is usually spaced as two written words. In deciding whether an expression is one or two words we must first understand the distinction between written and grammatical words. A **written word** is a sequence of letters not interrupted by spaces. A **grammatical word** is any sequence of morphemes—whether written open, closed, or with a hyphen—that cannot be interrupted by an unlimited number of other possible morphemes. For instance, the expression *good fin* is two words in both spelling and grammar; there is a space, and we can put between *good* and *fin* as many other morphemes as we have time and patience for: *good, useful, reliable, light-weight, pliable, tough, long-lasting, excellent . . . fin*. *Swim fin*, on the other

hand, may be two words in spelling, but it is a single grammatical word because we cannot put other morphemes between its parts: *swim*, *useful fin* is not possible. Thus, many expressions that are written with spaces are nevertheless single words from the standpoint of the grammar and vocabulary—for example, *Dutch treat*, *playing card*, and *snow job*.

Another method of forming new words is **derivation**. A **derivative** is a word formed by adding affixes to another word or to a bound base. This process of making words is also an old and a productive one in English. *Kindly*, *kindness*, *unkind* are all derivatives of *kind*, as are *liberal*, *liberty*, and *liberate* of the bound base *liber-*. *Kind* and its derivatives are native English formations, whereas the derivatives of *liber-* are loan-words from Latin and French and thus had been formed before they entered English. Because the actual coinage of the latter group of words took place in another language, their parts are not as immediately obvious as those of native formations like *kindness*.

Like compounding, derivation is a process of word-making that is still much used. Some new derivatives are formed because otherwise we have no simple way to express their meaning. When heads of state began holding “summit meetings” to discuss diplomatic problems, we needed a word for the process and thus coined *summitry*. When one scholar needed to talk frequently about “making something unambiguous,” he formed the derivative *disambiguate*; *clarify* might have done as well, but presumably the greater precision of *disambiguate* offset its lack of grace. Other derivatives are formed because English speakers are dissatisfied with an existing expression. Thus, the traditional name for a collector of antiques is *antiquary*, but some antiquaries prefer the new derivative *antiquer*. Presumably *antiquary* sounds too dustily antiquated. It is one of the ironies of our society that we must be thoroughly modern, even in our collecting of the old. One Midwestern city has a Detoxification Center, which seems to be a place where drunks can sober up; *detoxification* was probably chosen for the name because it sounds more scientific, antiseptic, and impersonal than *sobering*. It is of course also more pompous. Occasionally derivatives are formed merely because they are pompous, or impressive—according to one’s opinion. A television reporter talks about the *unusuality* of an accident, by analogy with words like *eventuality*, because he thinks the Franco-Latin suffix *-ity* has more “class” than native English *-ness*.

Compounds combine two or more bases with each other, and derivatives combine affixes with a base. In both cases whole morphemes are being joined. Two other kinds of word-making, blending and acronymy, combine not whole morphemes, but usually just fragments. In a **blend**, the sounds and meanings of two words are partly combined, whether by accident or by design. A person who is talking comes to a point at which his ideas could be expressed by either of two words. Instead of choosing between them, he pronounces part of one word and part of the other. For example, someone



is saying, "I felt a \_\_\_\_\_ run down my back," and hesitates at the blank, with the words *shiver* and *chill* both in the back of his mind. The two words are, as it were, superimposed at the point where they are similar in sound, they blend together, and what actually comes out is "I felt a *skill* run down my back." Blends of this sort are slips of the tongue that are exceedingly common. In fact, if you are aware of their existence and start listening for them, you will hear a great many, both from other people and in your own speech. Such blends are **nonce words**, that is, they are coined on one occasion, perhaps inadvertently. No one takes particular note of them, so they are never used again. Sometimes, however, the same blend is created repeatedly or is imitated because it is useful, and it will consequently enter the vocabulary as a new word. One recent example is *meld* 'merge' from *melt* and *weld*.<sup>3</sup> In blends it is not only the pronunciation that is combined, but the meaning also. Thus the new *meld* combines the notion of 'firm union' from *weld* with the notion of 'flowing liquid' from *melt*. A somewhat older example is *flurry*, a blend of *flutter* and *hurry*.

In addition to blends that are slips of the tongue, there are blends that have been deliberately created. When our space program invented a combination of a balloon and a parachute to aid in the return of space capsules to earth, it was named a *ballute*. A few years ago a health-fad advocated the consumption of a half-and-half mixture of honey and cider vinegar, dubbed *honegar*. The executive secretary to an editor of a fashionable magazine may become an *executary*. A *middlescent* is someone between young adulthood and senior citizenship. The W.C.T.U. has promoted the "fruit fiesta," or *fruesta*, as a substitute for the cocktail hour. An *atomitat* is an atomic habitat, or an underground house. A *guesstimate* frees the *guesstimator* of responsibility for error.

Blends are not limited to single words. When the financial reporter for a small newspaper wrote that stocks had tumbled *to a new time low*, he apparently blended *a new low* with *an all-time low*. Many blends, like this one, belong to the pathology of language. Others, like the middlescent executary in her atomitat sipping honegar during the fruesta, are fanciful in origin. Only a few become productive and survive as additions to the vocabulary.

An **acronym** is always a deliberate creation. It is an abbreviation formed from the initial letters or syllables of several words and may be one of several kinds. The simplest type, the **initialism**, is an abbreviation of initial letters pronounced with the letter-names, for example, *DNA*, *STP*, *LSD*, *GOP*, *TVA*, *GI*, *VP*, *PX*, and the best known of all, *OK*. Initialisms are as old as the Roman inscription *SPQR*, from *Senatus Populusque Romanus* 'The Roman Senate and People,' and possibly much older. If the abbreviation consists of letters

<sup>3</sup>*Meld* as a term in card games like pinochle has an entirely different source; it was borrowed from the German verb *melden* 'announce.'



that can be pronounced collectively as a word, the result is the word **acronym**, for example, *UNESCO* /junɛsko/ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization; *HEW* /hju/ (Department of) Health, Education, and Welfare; *posh* /paʃ/, explained as an acronym of 'portside out, starboard home,' with reference to desirable accommodations on ships sailing to India; and *snafu* /snæfu/, often euphemized as 'situation normal, all fouled up.' *Snafu* had a host of similar forms (including *tarfu* 'things are really fouled up,' *fubar* 'fouled up beyond all recognition,' *sapfu* 'surpassing all previous foul-ups'), which were once extremely popular, but are completely unknown to some younger speakers. It is unlikely that they will survive as permanent additions to our vocabulary. Some forms can be pronounced either as initialisms or as word acronyms, for example, *AWOL* /e dʌbəjə o ɛl/ or /ewɔl/ and *UFO* /ju ɛf o/ or /jufo/, although in derivatives like *ufologist* 'one who studies unidentified flying objects' the acronymic pronunciation is necessarily used.

Acronyms are popular as the names for organizations of various kinds. It is particularly fashionable for the acronym to spell out a word whose meaning is somehow appropriate to the organization. In many cases we may suspect that the organization was deliberately given a name with initials that form a memorable acronym. For example, *WAC* is a straightforward acronym from Women's Army Corps, but the Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service were probably so called because the name yields the appropriate acronym, *WAVES*. Other names chosen with acronymic premeditation are *CRASH* for Citizens Rallying Against Slaughter on our Highways, *UJOIN* for the Union for Jobs and Income Now, *CLEAN* for California League to Enlist Action Now (an organization promoting censorship of literature), *VISTA* for Volunteers In Service To America, *QUEST* for Queens (New York) Educational and Social Team, *AID* for Agency for International Development, *WAIF* for World Adoption International Fund, *HEP* for Harlem Education Program, and *DARE* for either Developing Agricultural Resources Effectively or the Dictionary of American Regional English. Sometimes acronymic name-givers show a wry sense of humor, as with *MANIAC* for Mathematical Analyzer, Numerical Integrater and Calculator, *MISHAP* for Missiles High-speed Assembly Program, and *WAGGS* for World Association of Girl Guides and Scouts. In other cases the humor is probably not intentional. It is doubtful that whoever named the Cooperative Occupational Training program for high schools thought ahead to what *COT* students might be called or that the bureaucrat who named the Latin American Free Trade Association intended to produce *LAFTA*.

As several of the preceding examples show, acronyms are not limited to the single initial letters of successive words; several letters or syllables may be taken from the beginning of a word, as in *Comsat* from Communications Satellite Corporation, or the well-known *radar* from "radio detection and ranging" and *sonar* from "sound navigation and ranging," the *Comintern*

from Communist International, and the useful *Amerind* from American Indian.

Acronymy is not a major source of additions to the vocabulary, but it is a colorful one much in vogue. Although acronyms have a long history, they became especially popular during the 1930's when the New Deal created a multitude of governmental agencies with names too long to pronounce in full. The military during the Second World War promoted their use, and thereafter many civil organizations took up the practice. The phenomenon is not limited to the United States or even to English; Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, and Israelis have all proved adept at the game of coining acronyms. Since bureaucratic conditions favor their use, we can probably look forward to a steady increase in their importance.

Compounding, derivation, blending, and acronymy have in common that they make a new word by combining two or more morphemes or fragments of morphemes. They are synthetic processes that make a word by building it up from several parts. The next two processes to be considered are analytic, that is, they make a new word by breaking down an older one. The simpler of the two is **clipping**, which is merely the shortening of a word. The older name for a medical charlatan is *quacksalver*, so called because fraudulent doctors made a great deal of noise about their ability while applying their salve. Because *quacksalver* was too long a term for easy use, it was shortened to *quack*. Clipped forms are fairly common in casual language: *mike*, *photo*, *phone*, *gym*, *showbiz*, and *nuke* 'nuclear bomb' are only a few of many possible examples. Sometimes the clipped form is altered slightly, either by a change of sound as in *bike* from *bicycle* or by the addition of an ending as in *divvy* from *divide* and *ammo* from *ammunition*. Some clipped forms are so well established in English that few speakers would guess their origin. Examples are *fence* from *defense*, used as early as 1330, *mob* from *mobile vulgus* 'the moveable crowd,' used in 1688, and (sports) *fan* from *fanatic*, formed as recently as 1889.

A more complex process is that which goes by the general name of **metanalysis**. The term is a blending of the prefix *meta-* 'altered' with the word *analysis*. As the name implies, it refers to an analysis of a word into parts, in the course of which the original structure of the word is altered. For example, *another* historically is a fusion of the two words *an* and *other*, but in current English it is a single word. However, speakers do sometimes divide it; and when they do so, the division is likely to be *a* and *nother*, thus altering the structure of the word. The metanalysis of *another* is not limited to the very young, the uneducated, or the casual. A very learned man who had just delivered a speech at a formal scholarly gathering replied to a question, "That would be a whole nother talk." Doubtless if he had been editing what he said, he would have changed it to something like, "That would be another talk altogether," or "a completely different talk," but in the spontaneous defense of his ideas he used a form that many other English

speakers are also using. It is altogether possible that *nother* may take its place among words like *newt* and *nickname*, which acquired their *n*'s in the same way, their older forms being *an ewt* and *an ekename*.

*Icicle* is a fused compound; it comes from Old English *īs-gicel*, with the redundant meaning 'ice-icicle.' Historically the word should be divided *ic-icle*, but metanalysis as *i-cicle* has given rise to a new morpheme seen in *popsicle* or as an independent word in an advertisement for a machine that makes "eight *sicles* at a time in your freezer." One enterprising inventor has been reported to be working on a way to manufacture *beersicles*. *Sandwich* is a single morpheme in current English, but metanalysis has made it possible in some restaurants to order a *fishwich*. *Plumber* comes ultimately from the Latin word *plumbum* 'lead' and the suffix *-arius* 'pertaining to.' Since much pipe is made of lead, a person who worked with pipe was called a *plumber*. In English the word was a single morpheme, like *carpenter* (originally one 'having to do with wagons'). However, *plumber* was associated with agent nouns like *builder* from *build*, *worker* from *work*, and *writer* from *write*. Analogy then suggested the metanalysis of *plumber* into *plumb* and *-er* 'one who does the action of the preceding verb.' Thus a new verb *to plumb* 'work as a plumber, install pipes' came into existence, and it is not surprising to read of a prefabricated house, "The hull of the house is shipped in sections to the construction site already insulated, wired, and plumbed." The verb *burgle* has a similar history, as do *edit* and *typewrite* and a good many others. Some words formed by taking off a supposed or real affix include *enthuse* from *enthusiasm*, *resurrect* from *resurrection*, *sidle* from *sidling* 'sidelong,' *pea* from *pease* (the older form, which was mistaken as a plural, is preserved only in the nursery rime "Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold"), and *unit* from *unity*. This special kind of metanalysis is called **back formation** because it is the reverse of the usual process of derivation.

Borrowing and the kinds of word-making we have just looked at account for most of the new words that enter our language. Occasionally a word, like the technical term *mho*, has an oddly different origin. *Ohm* 'a unit of electrical resistance' was named for a German physicist, Georg Ohm. When electrical engineers needed a term for 'a unit of electrical conductance' which would be, as it were, the reverse of *ohm*, they simply reversed the spelling and pronunciation of *ohm* to produce *mho* /mo/. Except for a few sports of this kind, new words are made according to one of the patterns we have examined.

## Exercises

- For each of the following groups, tell how the parts are related to the meanings of the compound. The words in each group are similar to one another, but the groups differ.

1. bluebook, hardwood, highchair, hothouse, strongbox
2. lazybones, longhair, paleface, redskin, sorehead
3. birdcage, dishpan, mailbox, pigpen, wineglass
4. arrowhead, bedside, fingernail, shoelace, windowpane
5. composer-conductor, gentleman-scholar, poet-philosopher, prince-consort, queen-mother
6. earthquake, fleabite, heartburn, nosebleed, sunshine
7. crybaby, driftwood, playboy, glowworm, workman
8. blowgun, password, plaything, washcloth, whetstone
9. cutup, diehard, gadabout, go-between, standby
10. comedown, flashback, handout, puton, windup
11. blood-red, ice-cold, stock-still, stone-dead, sugar-sweet
12. frost-bitten, man-made, moss-covered, sun-dried, wind-blown
13. hard-hearted, high-pitched, narrow-minded, near-sighted, red-haired
14. bypass, downgrade, overflow, underline, uphold
15. applepolish, backbite, sightsee, stagemanager, tongue-tie

14. To which of the fifteen groups illustrated in the preceding exercise does each of the following compounds belong? Write the appropriate number by each word.

- |               |                         |                |
|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1. blackboard | 6. moth-eaten           | 11. setback    |
| 2. brainwash  | 7. nightfall            | 12. sky-blue   |
| 3. doghouse   | 8. open-handed          | 13. stowaway   |
| 4. doorknob   | 9. paintbrush           | 14. tenderfoot |
| 5. inbreed    | 10. secretary-treasurer | 15. watchman   |

15. After you have looked up the etymology of the following words in a dictionary, tell what process of word-making seems to have been involved (root-creation, echoic imitation, compounding, derivation, blending, acronymy, clipping, metanalysis, or back-formation).

- |                  |                         |              |
|------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 1. adder 'viper' | 7. gas                  | 13. pep      |
| 2. apron         | 8. gat                  | 14. ping     |
| 3. blooper       | 9. growth               | 15. reckless |
| 4. blotch        | 10. kodak               | 16. scavenge |
| 5. catnip        | 11. lox (liquid oxygen) | 17. twofer   |
| 6. dumfound      | 12. marquee             | 18. WASP     |

## CHANGES OF FORM

When a new word comes into English, it seldom maintains a decent stability for any length of time. Our vocabulary changes constantly, both in

pronunciation and in meaning. *Town* was once pronounced /tun/, the way most Americans now pronounce *tune*, and meant an enclosed place like a farmstead rather than a small city. Changes in meaning, however, will be discussed in a later chapter. For the present we will pass over them to consider briefly some of the ways a word's sound can change.

Sometimes a group of sounds will change for reasons we do not understand and in ways we could not have predicted. For example, about six hundred years ago, the word *crown* was pronounced as we now say *croon*; *find* was pronounced like *fiend*; *boot* like *boat*; *loan* like *lawn*; and *feet* like *fate*. In fact as Chapter 9 (pp. 336–37) makes clear in greater detail, most of our vowels have shifted their pronunciation. It was a very orderly change—every /e/ sound shifted to /i/, for example—and as a consequence Modern English is very different from the language of the poet Chaucer, who lived just when the change was beginning. This sound change, known as the Great Vowel Shift, is impressive in its regularity, but mysterious in its cause.

Other changes, however, have causes we can recognize and are at least partly predictable. **Assimilation**, a change whereby two sounds become more alike, has already been mentioned. We have a prefix *in-*, meaning ‘not,’ that comes originally from Latin and can be found in a word like *indecent*. This prefix changes its form to become more like certain following sounds, so that instead of *in-* we have *il-* in *illegal*, *ir-* in *irreverent*, and *im-* in *immoral*. The assimilation in these words actually took place in Latin, but the same sort of thing is still happening in current English, where it is usually not reflected in the spelling. Thus the word *spaceship* is a relatively new one, but instead of being pronounced as the spelling suggests, namely, /spes šip/, it is usually /speš šip/ with the morpheme *space* ending in the same sound that begins *ship*.

Misspellings are sometimes due to assimilation of sounds. The sound /t/ in certain positions within a word has changed to /d/ in the speech of many Americans. Consequently words like *metal* and *medal*, or *atom* and *Adam* are pronounced alike with a /d/ sound in both, creating the possibility of spelling confusion. This change of /t/ to /d/ is assimilatory because it happens only in positions where the /d/ is more like the surrounding sounds than is /t/.

The effect of assimilation is always to make a new pronunciation that is easier to say. Other things being equal, we prefer to expend as little effort as possible in speaking. Sometimes, however, ease of pronunciation is served by making sounds less rather than more alike, a process known as **dissimilation**. The spelling of *naphtha* suggests that it should have a consonant sequence /fθ/ in the middle of the word, but that combination is difficult to say; consequently, many speakers say something that might be spelled (and in fact is sometimes misspelled) “naptha,” changing the /f/ to a /p/, which is less like /θ/. A similar change often occurs in the word *diphthong*, as the common misspelling “dipthong” shows.



Dissimilation sometimes results in the complete loss of a sound. The word *governor* is pronounced by many with the first *r* silent, even though the sound would be pronounced in the related word *govern*. The two /r/ sounds in *governor* are difficult for many people to say, so the first one is dropped. Weak stress is also a factor in the loss of sounds. Although we usually pronounce the *h* in the words *he, him, his, her* when they are stressed as in *Tell him, not her*, the *h* is regularly silent when the words are weak, as in *Tell 'im and let 'er do what she likes*. To pronounce the *h*'s without emphasizing the pronouns in the second sentence would be abnormal English. The same loss of /h/ occurs within a morpheme in the standard pronunciation of *vehicle* as /viəkəl/, compared with the less common /vihikəl/.

Weak stress can result in the loss not only of consonants, but of vowels and entire syllables. Such loss from the middle of a word is very common in English.<sup>4</sup> Thus, *federal* loses its middle vowel, becoming something that might be spelled "fedral." Similarly *interest* is often pronounced as though it were "intrest" or even "inerst," although the latter pronunciation is an inelegant one. The vowel or syllable can also be lost at the beginning of a word.<sup>5</sup> *Fence*, produced from *defense* in this way, has already been mentioned. Casual pronunciations like "cause" for *because* and "bout" for *about* show that the process still operates in current English. The process of losing a final sound<sup>6</sup> can be seen in the pronunciation of *child* as "chile." The word *time*, as of a fork, was originally *tind*, but it lost its final /d/ so early that the word has been respelled. *Game* was earlier *gamen*, but it lost its entire final syllable. Many silent *e*'s in words like *date* were originally pronounced.

Sounds can be added as well as lost, the usual cause being increased ease of pronunciation. If two sounds are difficult to say together, a third may be added between them as a transition and is then known as an **intrusive sound**.<sup>7</sup> Thus, older English had the forms *thimel, thunor, and emty*, which are now *thimble, thunder, and empty*, with intrusive *b, d, and p*, respectively. Such intrusion of sounds still happens today, although we no longer change the spelling of words to show it. For many English speakers *cents* and *sense* sound exactly alike because an intrusive /t/ is pronounced between the /n/ and the /s/ of the latter word. Similarly a /p/ intrudes after the /m/ of *warmth*, making a pronunciation that might be spelled "warmph," and a /k/ intrudes after the /ŋ/ of *strength*, producing something like "strenkth." Although these spellings are wrong, the pronunciations are standard. Other

<sup>4</sup>The technical term for loss from the middle is **syncope**.

<sup>5</sup>The process is then called **apheresis**, or more specifically **aphesis** when it is an unstressed vowel that is lost, as in *mid* from *amid*.

<sup>6</sup>This process is called **apocope**.

<sup>7</sup>A name for the process is **epenthesis**.



intrusive consonants, like the /t/ in “acrosst,” are nonstandard both in pronunciation and spelling.

Vowels can also be intrusive, as in the pronunciations represented by “athletic,” “flum,” and “Henery,” for *athletic*, *film*, and *Henry*.<sup>8</sup> Although intrusive vowels like those just illustrated are always nonstandard, we have in English a number of words whose standard pronunciation includes a vowel that was originally intrusive, for example, *especial* beside *special*. Classical Latin had many words that began with the sequences *sp-*, *st-*, and *sc-*; but, because early speakers of French had a hard time saying such groups, they tended to put a vowel before the *s* to make the combination easier. English borrowed the word *special* straight from Latin, and the word *especial* from Old French, which had developed the intrusive vowel. Similar pairs of related words, although their histories are more complex, are *escalate* and *scale*, *espouse* and *sponsor*, *esprit* and *spirit*, *establish* and *stable*, *estate* and *status*.

In addition to being transformed, lost, and added, sounds can also be transposed. Such a change in the order of sounds is called **metathesis**. *Third* and *thirty* were earlier *thrid* and *thrity*, both words being derived from *three*, but the /r/ and the vowel that originally followed it changed positions. Similarly *bird* was originally *brid* but had its sounds reordered. This sort of metathesis still goes on today, especially in unstressed syllables; thus the affixes *per-*, *pro-*, and *pre-* are often pronounced interchangeably and may consequently be confused in spelling: *perform* as “preform” or “proform,” *prefer* as “perfer,” and *produce* as “perduce.”

Metathesis is not limited to /r/ but can affect any sound. *Tax* and *task* are different developments of the same Latin word *taxare*, and the verb *ask* has an alternate, older pronunciation that has been preserved only in the nonstandard form *aks*. Furthermore, metathesis need not be limited to adjacent sounds; the mispronunciation “mohogenized” for *homogenized* shows metathesis across syllables. When sounds are thus transposed from one word to another the result is a **spoonerism**, named for an English clergyman, W. A. Spooner, who was famous for such slips of the tongue. One example, which is part of children’s lore, is “Mardon me, Padam, but is this pie occupewed?”

Many sound changes have no known cause; some are due to the tendency of the human being to expend as little effort as possible in speaking; others are a consequence of slips of the tongue. Still others result from a confusion of words that involves meaning, such as the lay linguist’s invention of colorful word histories to “explain” the sense of a word.<sup>9</sup> When we borrowed the

<sup>8</sup>When the intrusive sound is a vowel the process is called *anaptyxis*, and the sound may be called a *svarabhakti* vowel.

<sup>9</sup>The story that *sirloin* comes from *Sir Loin*, having been knighted by some gourmandizing English king, has already been cited in footnote 27, p. 17.

Spanish word *cucaracha*, we turned it into *cockroach*, by associating it with the words *cock* 'rooster' and *roach* 'fish' however improbable the association may seem. So also, the French *chaise longue* is often reformed as *chaise lounge* because it is a type of furniture used for lounging. Nor are such changes of pronunciation limited to loan words. The native English *angnail*, literally 'painful nail,' was reformed as *hangnail* on the supposition that it is a nail that hangs. Such changes of pronunciation springing from an imaginary word-history are called **folk etymology**; because they involve misassociations of meaning, we will take them up again in a later chapter.

Another cause of sound change, which has already been discussed in Chapter 1, is **spelling pronunciation**. The normal state of affairs is one in which the spelling of a word is based on its pronunciation, but the opposite situation, in which pronunciation is affected by spelling, is common and seems to be getting more so. Thus, as we have already seen (pp. 3-4), the *t* in *often* is widely sounded today, and the *h* in *host* is universally pronounced. Yet both sounds have been introduced from the spelling, which may thus exert a strong influence on the pronunciation of literate (or, more accurately, hyperliterate) speakers.

A final cause of sound change is fashion. Certain sounds may be thought of as more elegant or more sophisticated than others. One such sound is the so-called broad *a* or /a/ in foreign words where the spelling is *a*. Thus *soprano* is pronounced with either /æ/ or /a/ in the second syllable, but many speakers feel there is something "better" about the /a/ pronunciation. Other words in which /a/ may be thought by some to have prestige value are *plaza*, *data*, and *amen*. A tony consonant sound is the /ʒ/ that occurs in the middle of *pleasure* and *leisure* for all English speakers and at the end of *garage*, *rouge*, and *prestige* for those who do not pronounce such words with final /j/. Because many words are pronounced with either /j/ or /ʒ/, but with /ʒ/ often considered more fashionable, the latter sound is sometimes extended to words where it does not historically belong. Thus, *subterfuge*, *siege*, *rajah*, and *Borgia* are regularly pronounced with /j/, but **hyperurban pronunciations** with /ʒ/ are sometimes heard nowadays for these words and others described in Chapter 3. The assumption seems to be that /ʒ/ is a sophisticated French sound, whose use, even when idiosyncratic, marks the user as *au courant*.

We have been examining some kinds and some causes of change in pronunciation. Most speakers have an understandable tendency to feel that any change from the pronunciation they are accustomed to is a degeneration of the language, used only by persons of subnormal intelligence and quite possibly of questionable morals. But change in language is inevitable and in itself is neither good nor bad. Some changes that have occurred in the past have been adopted into standard English and thus have become "good" English; others have not and thus are "bad" English. All such changes, however, whether they happened long ago or are going on today, whether

they are destined to be universally adopted as standard English or to be restricted to provincial or proletarian use, are of the same kind and have the same causes. The difference is not in the kind of change, but in the circumstances under which the new pronunciation is used.

## Exercises

16. What kind of pronunciation change does each of the following illustrate?

1. *velte* /svɛlt/ becoming /sfɛlt/
2. *surprise* /sɜrpraɪz/ becoming /səpraɪz/
3. *liberal* /lɪbərəl/ becoming /lɪbrəl/
4. *alone* becoming *lone*
5. *Scotland* /skatlənd/ becoming /skatlən/
6. obsolete *slummer* becoming *slumber*
7. *elm* /ɛlm/ becoming /ɛləm/
8. *hundred* /hʌndrəd/ becoming /hʌndərd/
9. *my first wish* becoming *my worst fish*
10. obsolete *crevice* becoming *crayfish*
11. *thyme* /tʰaɪm/ becoming /θaɪm/
12. *oblige* /oblaiʒ/ becoming /oblaiʒ/

17. What do the following misspellings suggest about the pronunciation of the words?

1. All the *test* were easy ones.
2. It's *aready* late.
3. Let me *congradulate* you.
4. He *ast* a question.
5. That is *exackly* right.
6. There is only a small *remanent* left.

18. A special kind of form change is the **malapropism**, which is the confusion and therefore misuse of words, named for Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play *The Rivals*, who said of herself, "If I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs!" (Act III, Scene 3). Which words are misused in that quotation, and what words might Mrs. Malaprop have intended to use?

## OBSOLESCENCE

The disappearance of words is easy to observe because even today many are in the process of being lost. We may recognize such words when we see them (they are more often seen in writing than heard in speech) and even use them under certain special conditions, but they are clearly not part of our everyday vocabulary, having about them an air of poetry. Dictionaries use the labels **obsolete** or **archaic** for such words, for example, *holt* 'a wood' and *palmer* 'pilgrim,' neither of which is likely to be found in normal current use. Some archaic words survive in common use in fixed expressions or related forms. For example *eke*, once a verb 'to increase, lengthen' has survived in the expression *to eke out*. Similarly, the obsolete *couth* 'known, familiar' survives in *uncouth*, and *sooth* 'true, pleasing' has related forms in *to soothe*, *soothing*, and *soothsayer*. The verb *wend* is hardly in general use nowadays; when it does occur, it is usually in the alliterative formula *to wend one's way*. The noun *strand* 'seashore' (the noun meaning 'string' is altogether a different word) will have exotic or poetic overtones for most speakers, although the verb *to strand* and its participle *stranded* are prosaic enough. Words can be rare in one place and still much used in another. *Shire* 'county' and *heath* 'wasteland' are familiar to an Englishman, but to an American they are poetic words, distant in time and space from his humdrum world.

All of these words are obsolete or archaic in America, but there was a time when they were common, familiar words to the American's linguistic ancestor, as any reader of Chaucer can testify. Indeed, all the words we have just examined are found in the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales* and were familiar everyday terms when Chaucer used them. There is, however, no need for us to go back to Chaucer for examples of obsolescence. There are those still living who can remember when *nickelodeon* was a word of everyday, or at least every-week, occurrence, and when the *zoot suit* was fashionable dress for movie stars. Other words, of course, have become completely obsolete, so that only those who have studied the history of English would even recognize them: *gale* 'sing,' *fold* 'the earth,' *thrim* 'power,' *wanhope* 'despair,' *gnorn* 'sad,' *ellen* 'valor,' and *shathe* 'enemy' are a few. Few present-day speakers think of *nightingale* as meaning 'night-singer' or recognize the 'enemy' in *unscathed*. It is a great pity that many words of this sort have disappeared from English. There is something darkly descriptive about *wanhope*, for example, and *ellen* is at least as courageous-sounding as the Franco-Latin *valor*.

From time to time obsolete words may be revived for special uses. Thus, when J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* writes about *mathoms* 'things with no use that one is nevertheless unwilling to part with' he has borrowed the name from Old English, where it meant 'treasure.' Similarly, the *orcs*, monstrous antagonists of the Hobbit heroes, are to be found by name in the

Old English poem *Beowulf*. Because Tolkien was an Anglo-Saxonist with a fondness for the old words, he resurrected some of them for the use of the inhabitants of Middle-earth.<sup>10</sup> There are also less exotic revivals, when an obsolescent word is given new life. For instance, *waistcoat* went out of general use in the United States, being supplanted when a term was needed by the synonymous *vest*. Then, around 1950 there was a revival of *waistcoat* with the traditional pronunciation and sometimes even the spelling *weskit*. Clothiers apparently felt that the older word had tone, which the Babbittish *vest* lacked, although ironically the *weskit* form is unfashionable in England (the *OED* calls it “vulgar”), where the standard pronunciation is /weskot/. The American revival of the word *waistcoat* coincided with a revival of the garment itself, thus demonstrating that both words and things are subject to the whims of fortune.

A word may become obsolete for either of two reasons: because the thing it names has passed from the scene (like *nickelodeon* and *zoot suit*) or because it has been replaced by some other word (like *holt* and *wanhope*). There is, however, no great variety of processes involved in the death of words to match those found at their birth.

From birth through growth and changes to death, most words have a long life-history. Because words are borrowed by one language from another, the history of an individual word is not limited to a single tongue. As English-speakers, we will naturally be more interested in the development of words in our language, but we must not forget that many of them had a long history before they entered English and became naturalized. The **etymology** of a word is its life-history, the development it has undergone from its origin through its changing forms and meanings to its present state. Like many other facts about a word, its etymology can be found, at least briefly described, in most dictionaries, and it is to the dictionary, as the chief source of information about words, that we will next turn our attention.

## Exercise

19. Words that have gone out of general use are still sometimes found in special contexts where they give an antique air. Use a dictionary to answer the questions about the following archaisms.
  1. What past participles does the verb *clepe* have?
  2. What is an *izzard*?
  3. How else might *iwis* be spelt?
  4. How is *ye* as in “Ye Olde English Pub” pronounced?
  5. If you knew *gramarye*, what would you know?

<sup>10</sup>Other examples are pointed out by John Tinkler, “Old English in Rohan,” in Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo, eds., *Tolkien and the Critics* (Notre Dame, 1968), pp. 164–69.



## WORDS AND DICTIONARIES

Ambrose Bierce, a cynical humorist of the early twentieth century, wrote a book called *The Devil's Dictionary*, in which he defined **dictionary** as "a malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of a language and making it hard and inelastic." It is doubtful that any lexicographers would agree with Bierce. They would more likely agree with Dr. Johnson, one of the most famous writers of dictionaries, that a lexicographer is a "harmless drudge." Still, people often use dictionaries in a way that justifies Bierce's definition.

Any conversation in which the word *dictionary* appears is likely to reflect some curious misconceptions about the nature and purpose of this most commonly used reference work. For example, we often talk about "the dictionary" as though there were some one great archetypal book of which all existing works are copies or abridgments. We may assume that all dictionaries give the same information, only in greater or lesser detail. We may also assume that every word in a dictionary is "good" and that any word not in the dictionary is either "bad" or nonexistent. We are sure that the dictionary knows whereof it speaks; it contains all and only truth, to guide us among the snares with which our linguistic path is set. On the contrary, any faith in the infallibility of a dictionary is ill placed and reflects a misunderstanding of its purpose.

Clear thinking about dictionaries will reveal the fact that there are a great many different ones, which differ among themselves in their purpose, their content, and their reliability. We will consider some of the variety of dictionaries in the following pages, but first we need to ask what it is that all dictionaries have in common. In the most general sense with which we need be concerned, a dictionary is a list of words with some information about each. A dictionary is commonly used as a reference work, consulted only on special occasions to find specific information, although there are some inveterate word-watchers who would rather read a dictionary than the latest novel. The words in a dictionary are usually arranged alphabetically, although there are exceptions, such as the thesaurus (usually a dictionary of synonyms, which may be arranged by meaning). The information given for each word usually includes a definition, although some special dictionaries give only one kind of information, such as pronunciation or etymology.

We can add two other very important facts about dictionaries. One is that none of them are complete. We have already seen that no book can ever contain all the words in the English language. Because English speakers are constantly making up new words and using old words in new ways, even the largest and most up-to-date dictionary will be incomplete before it is ever published. Dictionary-makers must feel rather like Alice in Looking-Glass Land when she discovered, after she and the Red Queen had run as fast and as long as they were able, that they were in the same place they had started from:



"Well, in *our* country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get someplace else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

No matter how long or how fast the lexicographer works, he cannot catch up with the speakers of English. Before he can finish his job and publish his dictionary, the word stock of English has changed, and he is still behind the times.

The other fact about dictionaries that we need to keep in mind is that they are more like newspapers than like legal codes. A dictionary reports facts about words as its editors have observed them. It does not lay down a series of laws telling you what you may or may not do. Some dictionaries may editorialize a bit, but a good dictionary will always indicate when it is just giving the facts and when it is expressing an opinion. In any case, modern dictionaries editorialize as little as possible. It is not really the lexicographer's fault if some people treat his work as an infallible set of rules "for cramping the growth of a language and making it hard and inelastic." A good dictionary reports the facts as clearly and accurately as it can. What the dictionary-user does with the facts is up to him.

English dictionaries have a long history. The earliest ones, which were bilingual, were intended for medieval schoolboys studying Latin and consisted merely of a list of Latin words together with an English synonym for each. It was not until 1604 that the first all-English dictionary was published by Robert Cawdrey, with the complete title:

*A Table Alphabeticall, contayning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French. &c.*

*With the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons.*

*Whereby they may the more easilie and better understand many hard English wordes, which they shall heare or read in Scriptures, Sermons, or elsewhere, and also be made to use the same aptly themselves.*

Cawdrey's title, which is short enough as early book titles go, clearly indicates the nature of his work and the readership for whom it was intended. The 2500 "hard words" in the book include *aberration*, *circumspect*, *horizon*, *incorporate*, *mutation*, and *obnubilate* 'to cloud.'

Presumably, any gentleman could be expected to understand such words because of his long education in Latin. His fair lady, who had a more limited schooling, however, needed some little crib book to help her keep up with

the knowledge explosion of the seventeenth century and to supply her with elegant words to decorate her conversation. Each word in Cawdrey's dictionary was given a short definition, often a literal translation of the Latin source. Thus *aberration* was defined as "a going a stray, or wandering." From such a limited beginning came the great English dictionary tradition.

In the hundred and fifty years after Cawdrey, lexicographers vied with and plagiarized from one another, making gradual improvements in their work until in 1755 Dr. Samuel Johnson published his great *Dictionary of the English Language*. By Johnson's time it had become usual for dictionaries to attempt a complete listing of English words with full definitions, to show what syllables were stressed, to indicate the part of speech, and to guess—often not very successfully—at the etymology of the word. Johnson did all of these things better than his precursors and added the practice of illustrating his definitions with short quotations from English writers, showing how the words were actually used.

In the century following Johnson the only significant advance in lexicography was that dictionary-makers began to indicate the pronunciation of words. The two most famous pronouncing dictionaries were those by Thomas Sheridan (1780) and John Walker (1791). These men were actors and elocutionists, or teachers of public speaking. Consequently, the pronunciations they recorded tended to be the artificially formal ones of the stage and the platform rather than the more natural pronunciations of conversation.

The most famous name in lexicography is certainly that of the American Noah Webster, although he is often confused with his younger contemporary Daniel Webster, the statesman. Webster's two-volume *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) was a highly successful work not only in the United States but in England as well. Indeed, it made Webster's name synonymous with dictionaries, so that "What does Webster say?" seldom means anything more than "What is in any dictionary?" Yet Webster's dictionary did not make any notable contributions to the art of lexicography. In fact, his method of indicating pronunciation is poorer than that of either Sheridan or Walker.

In 1884, exactly one hundred years after the death of Dr. Johnson, *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, now usually known as *The Oxford English Dictionary* (see footnote 1, p. 3), began to be published. The *OED* was not the work of a single man but was produced by the combined efforts of many. Behind the more than 16,000 folio pages of the *OED* lies an immense amount of work on the part of men around the world. It is without doubt the finest dictionary in existence for any language.

As its complete title states, the *OED* is a historical dictionary. It attempts to list every word that has ever been used in English and to trace the history of each word from its first recorded appearance to the time of the dictionary's compilation, describing all changes in spelling, use, and meaning. The *OED* is not the kind of book you would want to keep on your desk to use in deciding

whether you should spell *traveler* with one or two *l*'s; but as a source for information about the earlier history of words in English, the *OED* is without peer.

Today there are many different kinds of dictionaries that serve special purposes. Most convenient for general use is a desk dictionary, like *The American College Dictionary* (1947) and its successor *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1968), *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1953), *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (1963), *Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary* (1963), or *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1969). Any of these dictionaries will serve the needs of the college student or the general user.

For more detailed reference there are several larger works. The best known, and a highly reliable book in most respects, is *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. When the *Webster's Third* appeared in 1961 it stirred up a controversy that has not yet completely subsided. One group of reviewers greeted it with cries of "anarchy," "disastrous," "vulgarism," and even "bolshevik." Another group hailed it with "excellent," "tremendous scope," "distinguished, scholarly work," and "the new authority." The teapot tempest that surged around the dictionary has been chronicled by James Sledd and Wilma R. Ebbitt in *Dictionaries and THAT Dictionary* (Chicago, 1962).

In addition to the general dictionaries, there are more specialized ones, such as those devoted to slang, occupational jargons, abbreviations, or place names. There are dictionaries that restrict their attention to pronunciation, synonyms, or etymologies. There are dictionaries that treat older forms of English, such as the *Middle English Dictionary* (in progress), and regional forms, such as the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (in preparation). There are dictionaries of usage and, to come full circle, there are still bilingual dictionaries and dictionaries of hard words. Our English word-stock has been recorded with loving care by generations of harmless drudges.

A typical dictionary, say the desk dictionary that you probably own, reports a great many facts about English words. Indeed, it gives more information than most dictionary-users are aware of. Suppose you test yourself before reading any further. Without looking at the following paragraphs, jot down as many different kinds of information about words as you might expect to find in a dictionary. Then read on to see whether you are fully aware of that book's potential usefulness.

Although desk dictionaries differ in what information they give about any particular word and in the order in which they give it, you can expect to find some things in all of them.

**Written Form.** The main entry of the word will, of course, give you its spelling. This bit of information is probably what dictionaries are most often consulted for, but it can be a complex matter. Compound terms, like *mailbag*,

*man-hour*, and *market value*, may be spelled solid, hyphenated, or spaced. There is much variation in the spelling of such compounds; a dictionary will indicate one common variety, although there may be others. Some words like *judgment* or *judgement* have more than one standard spelling; a good dictionary will record the variation. The main entry will usually show by raised dots or some other device where the written word can be divided at the end of a line. Thus, in *the•sau•rus* the break would usually be before, rather than after, the *r*. Homographs, different words that are spelled alike, will usually be marked by raised numbers, as *gum*<sup>1</sup> of a tree and *gum*<sup>2</sup> of the teeth.

**Pronunciation.** Immediately after the entry form, the dictionary will give the pronunciation of the word, using sound symbols that will vary from one dictionary to another. For example, *merchandise* may have its pronunciation indicated something like this: (mûr'chən·dîz). To interpret the pronunciation symbols correctly, you will have to familiarize yourself with their explanation in the front part of the dictionary.

The pronunciations listed in any dictionary need to be treated with caution because as we have seen many words can be said in more than one way. Thus the noun *merchandise* may end in /s/ as well as in /z/, and most dictionaries will show that variation. But no dictionary can record all the pronunciations of a word. For example, *height* has three pronunciations, /haɪt/, /hæɪtθ/, and /haɪθ/, although most dictionaries will list only one or two of them. The omission of a pronunciation does not mean that the dictionary-makers thought it nonexistent or wrong, only that they chose to omit that piece of information because they did not have room for everything. In interpreting a dictionary, you cannot rely on negative evidence; what is not in the dictionary may be just as real and just as "correct" as what is there. An educated person has to use his ears to supplement the dictionary.

Moreover, the order in which variant pronunciations are listed is not especially significant. It may indicate the pronunciation that the editors believe to be most common, but it is not an expression of preference. First does not mean best; it very likely means nothing at all.

In addition to the consonants and vowels of the word, the pronunciation will show the stress and the syllable division, which often differs from the spelling division used in breaking a word at the end of a line. Although *the-sau-rus* would usually have that spelling division, in speech the /r/ goes with the preceding syllable: (thə·sôr'əs), as a dictionary might show it.

**Grammatical Information.** The grammatical information given by dictionaries is limited to the part of speech for a word and the labels **prefix**, **suffix**, or **combining form** for bound forms like *pre-*, *-er*, or *tele-*. Following the label, the inflected forms of a noun, verb, or adjective are listed if they are in any

way irregular or doubtful. The inflected forms commonly listed are the plural of nouns, the past tense and the participles of verbs, and the comparative and superlative of adjectives.

**Definition.** The heart of a dictionary entry is the definition or, more often, definitions. Since most words have more than one meaning, the definitions are usually grouped together in some logical order, which may be historical, with the oldest meanings first; or one of frequency, with the most common meanings first; or purely logical, beginning with the most general meaning and ending with the most specific. The introductory matter to each dictionary will tell what arrangement its editors have tried to follow—perhaps some convenient compromise. Since most dictionary-users do not bother to read the front matter, they are unaware that there is any order, and therefore the arrangement of definitions is hardly more than a game the lexicographer plays with himself. The most important thing to remember is that the order of definitions, like that of pronunciations, implies no evaluation of “correctness.” Dictionary-users, even otherwise highly intelligent ones, often act as though every list were a statement of preference. Things must come in some order, but in a dictionary the first is not better than the last.

To supplement the formal definitions, a dictionary may use citations or brief phrases containing the word in question. These illustrations are often invaluable. We can frequently get a better idea of the meaning of a word from seeing it in actual use than we can from reading a technical definition.

Usage labels are often found among the definitions. They indicate that a word’s use is restricted in certain ways, particularly with respect to level and style (matters that are treated more fully in Chapter 2), but also with respect to currency, locality, and field. The two basic levels are the standard, which is generally acceptable in educated use, and the nonstandard, everything else. These two levels are not clearly demarcated, and they are in fact really two directions on a scale that can be still more finely divided, as when we distinguish between U and non-U within the standard level. Dictionaries regularly leave standard forms unmarked and may use terms like *substandard* or *illiterate* in place of *nonstandard*.

Style is often confused with level but is in fact something quite different. It is also called “functional variety” because it is the way we adapt our language to different uses. A style is a kind of language suitable for a particular occasion, such as a commencement address or a dormitory bull session. Even more than level, style is a scale with many values, but the two directions are usually called *formal* (which in the extreme becomes ritualistic) and *informal* (which at its extreme becomes intimate). Dictionaries customarily leave all formal varieties unlabeled and for informal may use such additional labels as *slang* and *colloquial*.

Currency is a scale with the notion “common in present-day English” at



the unlabeled end and terms like *rare*, *archaic*, and *obsolete* toward the opposite end. Locality labels show that a word is restricted to or characteristic of a particular geographical area, such as Scotland, the United States, or even a region of the United States, such as the South. Field labels indicate that a word, or often one meaning of a word, is limited to a special subject matter, such as psychology, chemistry, or linguistics. The most important thing to remember about all usage labels is that they are rough descriptions of use that can be no more than approximately correct.

**Etymology.** The dictionary's etymology is a highly condensed statement of the origin of the entry word. In some dictionaries it comes before the definitions, in others, after. In describing etymologies, all dictionaries make use of a number of abbreviations. These vary somewhat from one book to another but include abbreviations of language names like *OE* for Old English and special signs like < meaning 'derived from.' Some desk dictionaries give quite elaborate etymologies, tracing a word back to its prehistoric origins; others are more laconic, giving hardly more than its immediate source. For this information, as well as other information that varies from dictionary to dictionary, the reader can consult whichever book is best for his immediate purpose.

**Related Forms.** In many entries you will find related forms of one kind or another. For instance, the entry may include and define idioms using the main word. Derivatives that are formed from the main word and whose meanings are obvious will be listed. Synonyms and antonyms may be listed and distinguished from one another in a short note. **Collateral adjectives**, which are closely related in meaning but quite different in form from their corresponding nouns, like *equine* and *horse*, may be listed under the noun for cross reference.

**Supplementary Matter.** In addition to the usual vocabulary entries, most desk dictionaries provide a wide variety of supplementary information, either in the body of the work, in special prefatory sections, or in appendixes. Abbreviations, names of people, places and colleges, rimes, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, English usage, special signs and symbols, forms of address, weights and measures, the history of English, grammar, American dialects, vocabulary-building, reference works, and manuscript preparation are topics that may be covered. No dictionary will include all of these or present them in quite the same way as another dictionary, but if you examine your dictionary carefully, you are likely to be surprised at the amount of information it gives in addition to straightforward English vocabulary entries.

A dictionary is the most useful book a student can own, provided he uses it with common sense. Dr. Johnson, whose opinion we can rely on in such



matters, once remarked that “dictionaries are like watches; the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true.” If Johnson, who was a leading figure in what is often known as the Age of Authority, had such a healthy skepticism about lexicographical authority, we should pay attention to him. The best English dictionaries are very good indeed. For the most part we can use them with confidence and gratitude, but we must remember that even they may not go quite true.

## Exercises

20. In addition to general dictionaries, there are a number of specialized works that record only a particular kind of information about words. Go to the reference section of your library and find ten different specialized dictionaries. For each write a bibliographical entry (title, edition, place of publication, publisher, date of publication) and a sentence or two describing the content of the book.
21. Use the dictionary entries reprinted below to answer the following questions.

**happy** (hap'ē) *adj.* **·pi·er, ·pi·est** 1. Enjoying, showing, or characterized by pleasure; joyous; contented. 2. Attended with good fortune; lucky. 3. Produced or uttered with skill and aptness; felicitous: a *happy* phrase. 4. *U.S. Slang* Manifesting irrational or abnormal behavior for some (specified) reason or in some (specified) way; crazy; nutty: used in combination: *slap-happy*; *trigger-happy*. [ $<$  HAP]

— **Syn.** 1. glad, joyful, delighted, blissful, rapturous. Compare **CHEERFUL**. — **Ant.** unhappy, sad, unfortunate, inopportune.

**happy-go-lucky** (hap'ē-gō-luk'ē) *adj.* Trusting habitually to luck; cheerful; unconcerned; easygoing.

**Haps-burg** (haps'bûrg, *Ger.* häps'böörkh) A German family prominent from about 1100, to which belonged rulers of Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, the Holy Roman Empire, and Spain; the male line ended in 1740: also spelled *Habsburg*.

**Haps-burg-Lor-raine** (haps'bûrg-lə-rān', *Ger.* häps'böörkh-lə-rān') The royal house of Austria, 1740–1918.

**ha-ra-ki-ri** (har'ə-kir'ē; hä'rā-kē'rē) *n.* Suicide by disembowelment, traditionally practiced by high-ranking Japanese when disgraced or in lieu of execution: also *hari-kari*. Also **ha'ra-ka'ri** (-kā'rē). [ $<$  Japanese *hara* belly + *kiri* cut]

**ha-rangue** (hə-rang') *n.* A lengthy, loud, and vehement speech; tirade. — **Syn.** See **SPEECH**. — *v.* **·rangued, ·ranguing** *v.t.* 1. To address in a harangue. — *v.i.* 2. To deliver a harangue. [ $<$  F  $<$  Med.L *harenga*  $<$  OHG *hari* army, host + *hringa* ring] — **ha-rangu'er** *n.*

**Ha-rar** (hä'rər) A Province of east central Ethiopia; 156,000 sq. mi.; pop. about 2 million; capital, **Harar**, pop. about 40,000; formerly also *Harrar*.

**har-ass** (har'əs, hə-ras') *v.t.* 1. To trouble or pursue relentlessly with cares, annoyances, etc.; torment. 2. *Mil.* To worry (an enemy) by raids and small attacks. [ $<$  OF *har-asser*  $<$  *harer* to set dogs on, prob.  $<$  OHG *haren* to cry out] — **har'ass-er** *n.* — **har'ass-ment** *n.*

**Har-bin** (här'bin) The capital of Heilungkiang Province, NE China, on the Sungari; pop. 1,595,000 (est. 1958).

**har-bin-ger** (här/'bin-jər) *n.* 1. One who or that which goes before and announces the coming of something; herald. 2. Formerly, a courier who rode in advance of a party to arrange for lodging. — *v.t.* To act as a harbinger to; presage; herald. [< OF herbergeor provider of shelter < herberge shelter < Gmc.]

**har-bor** (här/'bər) *n.* 1. A sheltered place, natural or artificial, on the coast of a sea, lake, etc., used to provide protection and anchorage for ships; port. Abbr. *h.*, *H.* 2. Any place of refuge or rest. — *v.t.* 1. To give refuge to; shelter; especially, to conceal or be hospitable to harmful persons or things: to harbor thieves. 2. To entertain in the mind; cherish: to harbor a grudge. — *v.i.* 3. To take shelter in or as in a harbor. Also *Brit.* **har'bour**. [ME herberwe < OE here army + beorg refuge] — **har'bor-er** *n.* — **har'bor-less** *adj.*

**har-bor-age** (här/'bər-ij) *n.* 1. A port or place of anchorage for ships. 2. Shelter; lodging; entertainment.

**har-bor-mas-ter** (här/'bər-mas'tər, -mä's/-) *n.* An officer in charge of enforcing the regulations of a harbor.

**harbor seal** A hair seal (*Phoca vitulina*) common along the north Atlantic coast of the United States: also called *sea calf*, *sea dog*.

\*Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary (New York, 1963), p. 610.

1. What other spellings are there for *hara-kiri*?
2. Which spelling is recorded: *harbor master*, *harbor-master*, *harbormaster*?
3. If you wanted to hyphenate *harangue* at the end of a line, where should the hyphen go?
4. Is the *ng* of *harbinger* pronounced like that of *sing* or like that of *singe*?
5. What two pronunciations does *harass* have?
6. What parts of speech may *harbor* be?
7. What are the inflected forms of *happy*? Of *harangue*?
8. How many different senses are listed for *happy*?
9. What emotional associations does the transitive verb *harbor* have?
10. What is the scientific term for *harbor seal*? What other nontechnical names are there for it?
11. What example is cited for *happy* in the sense 'felicitous'?
12. What abbreviations are there for *harbor*?
13. What three limitations (regional, stylistic, and grammatical) are there on the use of *happy* to mean 'crazy'?
14. In what occupation does *harass* have a special meaning?
15. What limitation is there on the spelling *harbour*?
16. What do the parts of the word *hara-kiri* mean in Japanese?
17. From what language is *harangue* ultimately derived? From what language did it enter English?
18. *Harbor* was originally a compound of words that had what meanings?

19. What antonyms are there for *happy*?
20. Under what word would you look to find synonyms for *harangue*?
21. What nouns are derived from *harass*?
22. Who were the *Hapsburgs*?
23. In what country is *Harar*? *Harbin*?

# 5

## GRAMMAR

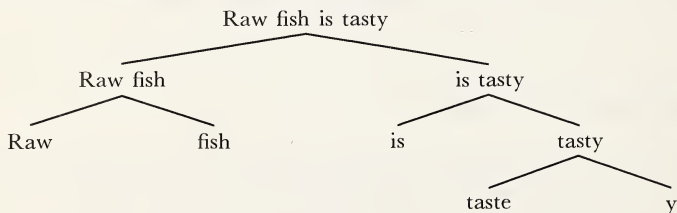
Words alone do not make a language. A person can memorize all the morphemes, words, and idioms in a dictionary, with their pronunciations, meanings, parts of speech, and all other information given for them, and yet be unable to speak or write even one sentence of the language. Beyond knowing vocabulary, it is necessary also to know grammar.

### HIERARCHIES AND TREES

**Grammar**, in the sense the term is being used here, is the way morphemes are joined together to make larger units—words, phrases, clauses, and ultimately whole sentences. In joining morphemes, however, we do not simply put them one after another like beads on a string. That is to say, grammatical order is not merely linear sequence, but is another kind of order called **hierarchical structure**. In a hierarchy some units take precedence over and encompass others. Hierarchies are all around us, not only in language but in all forms of human activity and organization. For instance, a military regiment consists of several battalions; each battalion consists of several companies; each company, of several platoons; each platoon, of several squads; each squad, of several soldiers. Although it is true that a regiment is made up of soldiers, the make-up does not go directly from regiment to individual GI, but rather through a series of hierarchically structured units.

Although we do not usually stop to think about it, almost every aspect of our lives is hierarchically structured. Such organization is simply a consequence of being human, for it is the nature of man to organize himself and his environment, and complex organization requires hierarchies. It is therefore hardly surprising that we should find such structure also in language, man's most human activity.

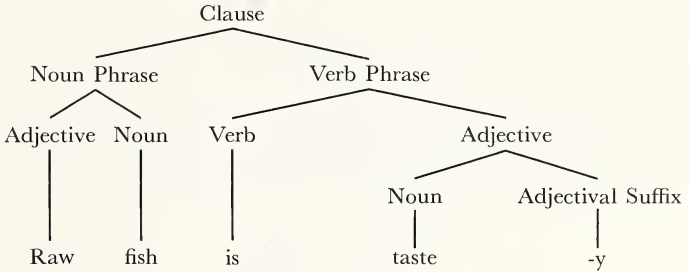
Within a regiment, soldiers that belong to the same squad are more closely associated with one another than with other men from different squads. Closeness of association is a consequence of hierarchy. In grammar, hierarchical structure means that in any sentence some of the morphemes go together more closely than others do. For example, in the sentence *Raw fish is tasty* we can easily recognize five morphemes: *raw*, *fish*, *is*, *taste*, and *-y*, but it is not enough to say that the sentence consists of those morphemes in that linear order. To do so would be to miss the very important point that *taste* goes more closely with *-y* than it does with *is*, that *fish* goes more closely with *raw* than it does with *is*, and that *is* goes more closely with *tasty* than it does with *raw fish*. The sentence then is not simply one morpheme linked to another: *Raw + fish + is + taste + y*; it is, rather, a grouping of the morphemes that we can show by using parentheses: (*Raw + fish*) (*is (taste + y)*). The parentheses show which morphemes go most closely together and which units take precedence over others by encompassing them. It is as though we went about dividing the whole sentence into parts, first breaking it at its weakest, least cohesive points, but continuing the process until we had reduced the sentence to its individual morphemes, thus:



This way of showing the hierarchical structure of a sentence is called a **tree diagram**<sup>1</sup> because the repeated divisions make a pattern somewhat like that of the branches of a tree. In very long sentences the use of parentheses can easily be confusing, so the tree diagram is a more convenient way of showing grammatical order. In the tree diagram the lines that lead down from one item—for example, the phrase *raw fish*—to the next lower items—in this case the words *raw* and *fish*—are called **branches**; and the points between which lines run are called **nodes**.

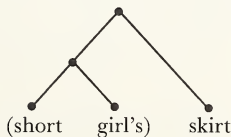
<sup>1</sup>Those who prefer it can use the fancier term **dendritic** (from the Greek for 'tree-like') **diagram**.

Instead of labeling the nodes with the phrases and words that the sentence is made of, we can substitute general terms for the kind of unit found at each node, as in the tree below, which gives more information than the other diagram because it tells not only what hierarchical order the sentence has, but also what kind of units the hierarchy is made of:



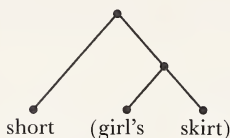
Just as a regiment is ultimately made up of soldiers, so the sentence is of morphemes—they are its **ultimate constituents**. But between the regimental level and the individual soldier there are intermediate levels of organization—battalions, companies, platoons, and squads. So also between the sentence and the morpheme there are intermediate levels—clauses, phrases, and words of various types. The sentence above is a single clause whose ultimate constituents are *raw*, *fish*, *is*, *taste*, and *-y*; but the **immediate constituents** of the clause are a noun phrase and a verb phrase. The immediate constituents of the noun phrase are an adjective (*raw*) and a noun (*fish*). The immediate constituents of the verb phrase are a verb (*is*) and an adjective, which in turn has its own immediate constituents—a noun (*taste*) and an adjective suffix (*-y*). The complex structure that can be found in even such an elementary sentence is a far cry from any simple ordering of items one after the other.

Indeed, linear arrangement is of no great importance in itself; its significance is as a signal of hierarchical structure, albeit an imperfect one. Thus, two expressions with the same linear arrangement may nevertheless have different hierarchical structures. For example, suppose a boutique specializes in skirts of various lengths for short girls. A garment from that store would be a short girl's skirt, with the following structure:

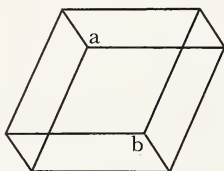




Another shop has miniskirts for girls of all heights, but none for women. What it sells is also a short girl's skirt, though with a different structure:

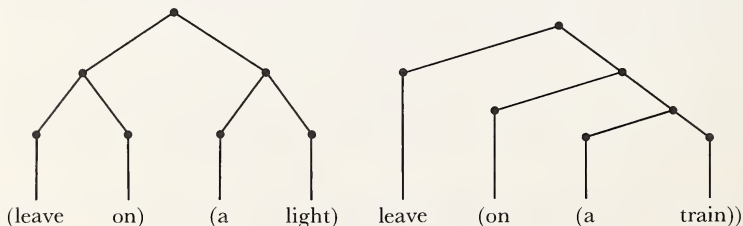


These two phrases are made of the same words in the same linear order, but with different hierarchical arrangements. Consequently, the expression *short girl's skirt* is like an optical illusion that can be seen in either of two ways, much like a two-dimensional drawing of a tilted box:



If you focus on *a*, the box seems to be leaning toward you; and if you focus on *b*, it seems to be leaning away. By moving your eye back and forth between the two points, you can shift the perspective that you read into the flat lines. So the meaning of *short girl's skirt* depends on how it is interpreted, on what kind of hierarchy we read into the linear arrangement. If you come across the phrase without a context to make the meaning clear, it will be ambiguous, just as the drawing is.

Similarly, the two expressions *leave on a light* and *leave on a train* are superficially alike, inasmuch as their words are in the same linear order. They are, however, not at all the same hierarchically. In the first, *on* is an adverbial particle attached to the verb *leave*; in the second, *on* is a preposition attached to its object, *a train*:



In spite of the similarity of word order, the expressions are structurally different, and that difference is signaled in a number of ways. For one thing, the *on* in *leave on a light* has a strong stress, whereas the *on* in *leave on a train* would normally be weaker. Furthermore, if there should be a pause in the first expression, it would come after *on*, thus grouping it with *leave*: *leave on|a light*; whereas a pause in the second would tend to come before *on* so as to group it with its object: *leave|on a train*. But a still better signal of the structural difference is the fact that the adverbial *on* can be moved to the end of the expression—*leave a light on*—whereas the preposition cannot—\**leave a train on*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, linear sequence alone is not enough to show the hierarchical, treelike structure of a sentence; we need other kinds of signals, which a later section of this chapter will take up in more detail.

## Exercises

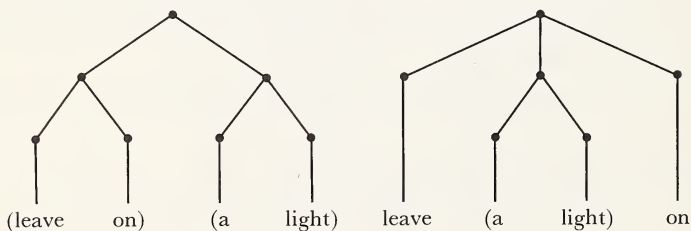
1. Draw two trees for each of the following sentences, using those on pages 134 and 135 as models.
  1. Fresh snow is chilly.
  2. Loud noise is dangerous.
  3. Purple hair is stylish.
2. Draw trees like those on p. 136 to show how the words of the following expressions are hierarchically ordered. The members of each pair have different trees.
  1. drive out the highway / drive out the competition
  2. look up the word / look up the chimney
  3. run down a hill / run down a pedestrian
  4. turn on a switch / turn on a dime
  5. see through the window / see through the job
3. The following sentences are structurally ambiguous. Describe two meanings for each.
  1. The boy has polished shoes.
  2. George likes the girls playing tennis.
  3. She went to an old woman's college.
  4. That sandwich is made from raw onions and hamburger.
  5. Picasso made that statue in Chicago.
  6. He was asked kindly to leave.

<sup>2</sup>The asterisk marks expressions that are abnormal.

## DEEP AND SURFACE STRUCTURE

There are phrases like *leave on a light* and *leave a light on*, which are identical except for the position of the particle *on*. Since two such expressions seem to be much the same in meaning in spite of the difference in linear arrangement, we may ask whether they have the same or different hierarchical structures. That is, are the morphemes grouped together in the same way because the expressions are alike in meaning, or are they grouped in different ways because the expressions are unlike in their word order? The discussion so far has suggested that for each sentence there is just one hierarchical structure, but grammarians have found it useful to recognize two for every sentence. One, called **surface** or **grammatical structure**, corresponds most closely to the linear arrangement of the morphemes as they are pronounced; and another, called **deep** or **conceptual structure**, corresponds most closely to the meaningful grouping of the morphemes. As Chapter 4 showed, every sign is an association between an expression and a content; and since sentences as well as morphemes are language signs, they too have this dual nature, entailing a twofold structure.

Because *leave on a light* and *leave a light on* are the same in meaning, they have the same conceptual structure in which *leave* and *on* are grouped together. The difference in word order, however, means that the two expressions have distinct surface grammatical structures:



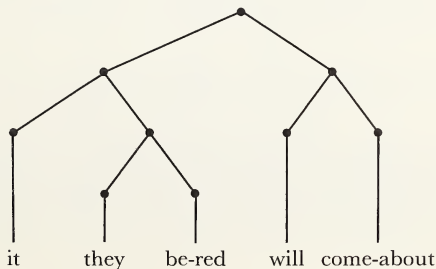
It is as though in moving *on* to the end, we had broken it away from its connection with *leave* and made it a unit equal in importance to the other two. And, indeed, if a speaker wants to pause while saying the expression, he might do so either before or after *a light*, or in both places: *leave | a light | on*, thus suggesting that the three parts are equal in grammatical importance. A difference in word order will always signal some difference in surface structure, but it will represent a difference in deep structure only if two meanings are involved. Surface structure is grammar seen from the viewpoint of pronunciation and spelling—the signals that express the sentence. Deep structure is grammar seen from the standpoint of meaning—the message that the sentence contains.

If we want to show deep structure with a tree diagram, it will often be necessary to reorder the morphemes of a sentence so that those elements that are closely connected in meaning are grouped together. Just as *leave a light on* has a deep structure that groups its morphemes in a fashion not suggested by the linear sequence, namely (*leave . . . on*) plus (*a light*), so do other expressions like *I don't think he's gone spelunking*, which usually means 'I think he has not gone spelunking.' On the level of deep structure, *not* goes with *he's gone spelunking* rather than with *I think*. It is as though on the surface level the verb *think* had drawn *not* out of the grouping we would expect of its meaning into quite a different structure:

DEEP: (I think) (he has not gone spelunking)  
 SURFACE: (I don't think) (he's gone spelunking)

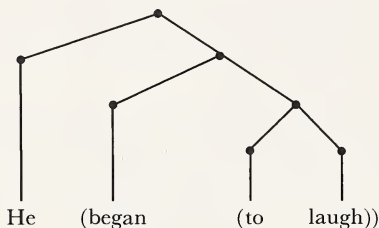
Not all verbs are capable of thus attracting *not*: *believe*, *expect*, and *imagine* are, but *fear*, *trust*, and *hope* are not. Thus, *I don't fear he's gone spelunking* never means 'I fear he has not gone,' although *I don't believe he has* is usually interpreted as 'I believe he has not.'

As the foregoing examples suggest, deep structure is often quite different from surface structure. The latter, by virtue of the fact that it is grammar related to expression, is relatively concrete, the kind of structure required by the spoken or written form of a sentence. Deep structure, on the other hand, because it is grammar related to content, may be an abstract grouping of morphemes demanded by meaning, though foreign to any arrangement that would actually be pronounced. The four sentences *They will redden*, *They will become red*, *They will come to be red*, and *It will come about that they are red* are different from one another in surface structure, consisting as they do of different words in different orders. Yet they appear to be alike in meaning in a way that suggests that they are surface variations of the same deep structure. Their common deep structure must be more abstract than the surface form of any of the sentences; it is itself unpronounceable, being rather a way of indicating the concepts shared by the four sentences. Some grammarians would represent such a deep structure by a tree diagram like the following:

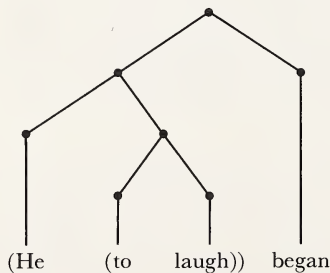


From such an abstract deep structure the actual sentences in their surface form are produced through various operations, such as **adjoining** morphemes, like the added *that* in *It will come about that they are red*; **deleting** morphemes, like the *it* omitted from *They will come to be red*; **permuting** morphemes, like the reordering of *come* and *be red* in *They will become red*; and **substituting** morphemes like the replacement of *become* by *-en* in *They will redden*. When a grammarian thinks of surface structures as derived from deep structure by such changes, the changes are called **transformations**. A transformation is thus a way of relating surface and deep structures by deriving one from the other.

Another sentence that has divergent deep and surface structures is *He began to laugh*, in which the surface grammatical subject of *began to laugh* is *he*, with *to laugh* as a complement of the verb:



The conceptual structure, however, is quite different. If we ask what it was that began, the answer cannot be *he*, which would imply that the sentence is saying that he came into existence. It says nothing of the sort. What began was his laughter, and thus the logical subject of *began* is *he to laugh*:



Such a sentence is different from *He wants to laugh*, in which *he* is both the grammatical and conceptual subject of *wants*. In the second case it is a person—he—who wants; but in the first case it is the event of his laughing that began.

The linear arrangement of morphemes is thus of even less importance for deep structure than it is for the surface form of sentences. Indeed, it may—as in *He began to laugh*—be quite irrelevant. How best to describe conceptual structures and to relate them to surface grammatical structures is a question that much interests grammarians today. It is the subject of active investigation and lively debate.<sup>3</sup> For the rest of this chapter we will be concerned mainly with surface structures, but at the end we will return to the question of how deep and surface structures relate to one another.

## Exercises

4. Some of the pairs below are expressions with the same meaning, even though their word order differs. In others the difference in linear order signals a difference in sense. Mark them *S* or *D* as they have the same or different meanings.
  1. Call back a friend. / Call a friend back.
  2. the upstairs maid / the maid upstairs
  3. time enough to eat / enough time to eat
  4. He bought chocolate milk. / He bought milk chocolate.
  5. At what are you looking? / What are you looking at?
  6. He ran it off. / He ran off it.
  
5. Not all adjectives are like *red* in having some related verb such as *redden* with the sense 'become red.' *White* has *whiten*, and *yellow* has a verb identical in form with the adjective—*They will yellow*—but *orange* has none at all. Which of the following adjectives have related 'become'-verbs, and what are they?
 

|         |          |          |             |
|---------|----------|----------|-------------|
| 1. deep | 3. empty | 5. flat  | 7. straight |
| 2. long | 4. full  | 6. round | 8. crooked  |
  
6. Identify first the surface grammatical subject of each sentence, then the deep conceptual subject. In identifying the conceptual subject, consider whether the action of the first verb refers to a person or an event.
  1. Mithridates started to drink a little poison every day.
  2. He hoped to build up an immunity.
  3. Professor Higgins tried to teach Eliza.

<sup>3</sup>A carefully described deep structure would probably be even less like the trees of surface structure than has been suggested here. It might look more like the formulas of symbolic logic than like normal sentence structure. For the sake of convenience, pseudo deep-structure diagrams have been used here merely to suggest the difference between the two levels.

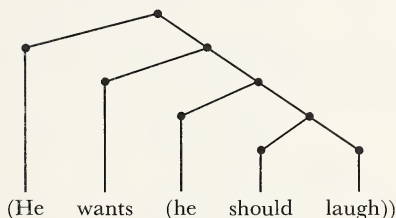


4. She stopped talking like a Cockney.
  5. Gulley continued painting his mural.
  6. He liked painting feet.
7. In each of the following sets, all three sentences are superficially alike, but *a* and *b* have different deep structures. Does the first sentence in each set resemble *a* or *b* more closely in its conceptual structure?
1. The tree was planted near a hill.
    - a. The tree was planted by a well.
    - b. The tree was planted by a workman.
  2. Zuleika cooked him a cheese soufflé.
    - a. Zuleika made him a purple muffler.
    - b. Zuleika made him a nervous wreck.
  3. She sounds slow.
    - a. She works slow.
    - b. She seems slow.
  4. The door was ajar at midnight.
    - a. The door was open at midnight.
    - b. The door was opened at midnight.
  5. All your friends need criticizing.
    - a. All your friends like criticizing.
    - b. All your friends deserve criticizing.
  6. The baby was too young to tickle.
    - a. The baby was too young to sit.
    - b. The baby was too young to hold.
  7. They had an hour to read.
    - a. They had a book to read.
    - b. They had a reason to read.
  8. Here is a riddle to puzzle everybody.
    - a. Here is a riddle to ask everybody.
    - b. Here is a riddle to amuse everybody.
  9. John allowed his wife to be good.
    - a. John urged his wife to be good.
    - b. John promised his wife to be good.
  10. He left the teapot in the cupboard.
    - a. He set the teapot in the dishpan.
    - b. He broke the teapot in the kitchen.
  11. Her hobby is playing poker.
    - a. Her hobby is collecting stamps.
    - b. Her hobby is costing money.

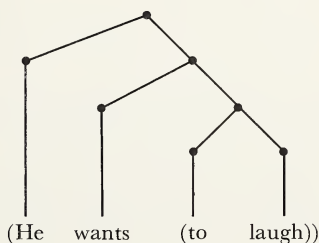
12. The car drove smoothly.  
 a. The shirt ironed neatly.  
 b. The rock fell suddenly.

## EMBEDDING

The sentences *He began to laugh* and *He wants to laugh*, in spite of their surface similarity, are quite different in their deep structure. Nevertheless, they have some things in common, even on the deep level. For example, each contains two deep-structure propositions. Thus, *He wants to laugh* combines *He wants something* and *He should laugh*,<sup>4</sup> with the second proposition nested inside or **embedded** in the first:

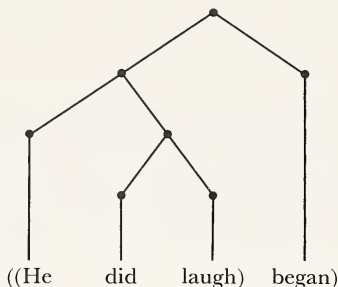


To convert this deep structure into the correct surface form, we need only delete the *he* of the embedded clause, which repeats the main subject, and substitute the infinitive marker *to* for the auxiliary *should*:

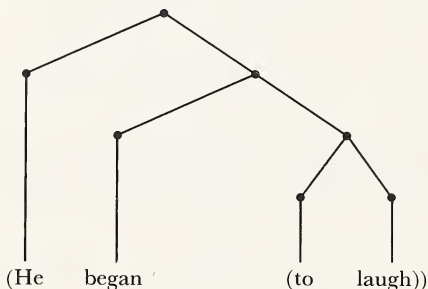


<sup>4</sup>Words not present in the surface structure, like *something* and *should*, are added here to make the deep-structure propositions look more normal. The choice of words to be added is to some extent arbitrary, but note the existence in some American dialects of expressions like *He wants you should go* beside *He wants you to go*, which is the basis for choosing *should* in this case.

*He began to laugh* also has two propositions—*Something began* and *He did laugh*—although they are slightly different and are embedded in a different way:

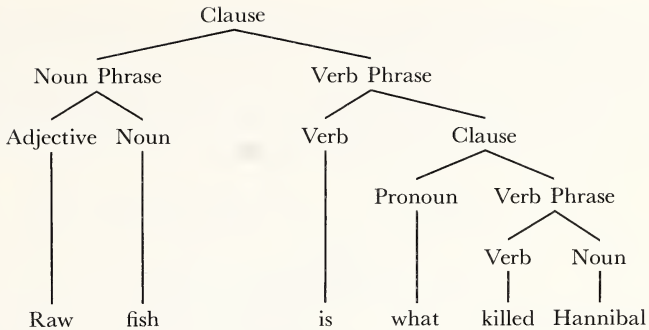


The appropriate surface structure is derived by substituting *to* for the auxiliary *did* and permuting *to laugh* with *began*:



Normally a sentence is made of clauses (*Because it rained, | the driver was late*); a clause, of phrases (*the driver | was late*); and a phrase, of words (*the | driver*). Often, however, the hierarchy does not proceed in such a straightforward fashion from sentence through clause and phrase to word. Instead, higher units may be incorporated within lower ones. Thus, a clause can appear inside another clause (*the driver hoped it would stop*) or inside a phrase (*the driver who was late*) or even as a word (*an I'm-always-late attitude*). Such hierarchical backtracking is called embedding.

Embedding is extremely important because it lets us say an unlimited number of different things with a limited number of words and grammatical patterns. For example, instead of *Raw fish is tasty* we might have *Raw fish is what killed Hannibal*, with a surface structure represented as follows.



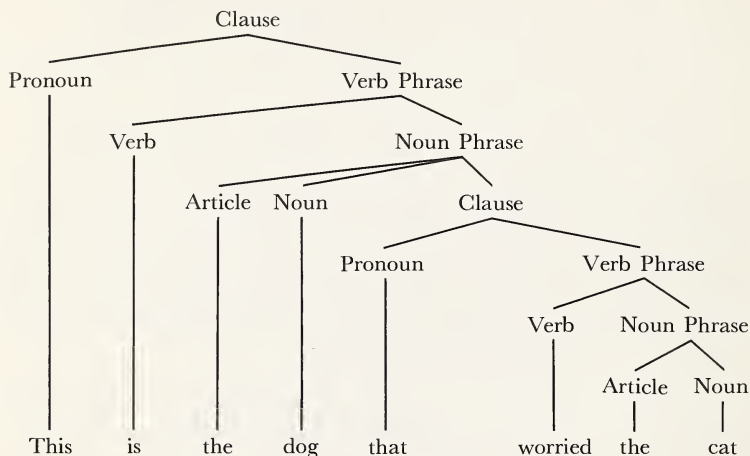
Or in place of *Hannibal*, we might have *the man who lived next door*, which includes another clause, and so forth. Since theoretically there is no limit to the number of such embeddings we can have, there are no theoretical limits to the expandability of a sentence. Thus we find things like *Albert said that Betty believed that Charles doubted that Deirdre wished that . . .*; or the well-known *This is the dog that worried the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built*.

Each new embedding adds new branches to the tree and thus increases its complexity. Just as the number of such embeddings is potentially unlimited, so is the theoretical complexity of grammatical trees. There are, however, practical limits to what we can understand. By the time the hearer gets to Deirdre, in the first of the two examples cited above, he may have forgotten who said something about Betty and what attitude Betty was supposed to have taken about the whole thing. Such limitations are on our ability to use language, not on the system that is available for our use.

Some kinds of complexity, however, are easier for us to manage than others. As long as our embedding is of the dog-that-worried-the-cat-that-killed-the-rat sort, we can cope with a good deal of it. There we are embedding each new clause at the end of another, and the result is no more difficult to understand than a series of independent sentences: *The dog worried the cat. The cat killed the rat. The rat ate the malt*. On the other hand, if we try to embed clauses in other positions we may run into trouble very quickly. Thus, *The rat that the cat killed ate the malt* may be understandable without great difficulty, especially if spoken with suitable pauses; but *The rat that the cat that the dog worried killed ate the malt* can scarcely be considered English at all.

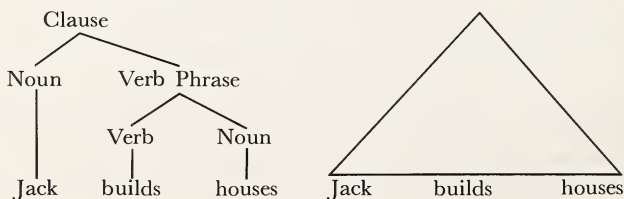
One clause can be embedded within another in a variety of ways, depending on where the embedding takes place and on what form the embedded clause assumes. A few common types of embedding will be shown here, but there are a great many others. One important type is the **relative clause**,

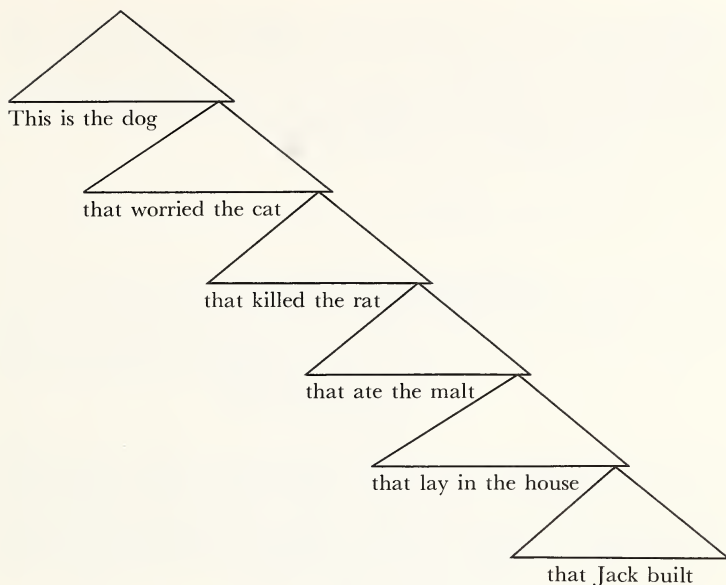
illustrated by *This is the dog that worried the cat*. The main clause, *This is the dog*, has *The dog worried the cat* embedded within it. It is as though the speaker started to say the first clause, but needed to identify which dog he meant, and so added the second clause as explanation: *This is the dog (The dog worried the cat)*. In the surface form, however, the subject of the embedded clause is replaced by the relative pronoun *that*:



Instead of *that* we might have had the relative pronoun *which* (*This is the dog which worried the cat*), or *who*, if we were talking about a human being (*This is the boy who worried the cat*).

When there are a great many relative clauses embedded one inside the other, as in the longer form of the house-that-Jack-built sentence, the hierarchical structure can become quite complex. We can show its broadest outlines by using triangles to replace the exact branching patterns in a tree diagram, as on the next page. Triangles represent the appropriate branching when we have no interest in the details of the structure, so that the diagram on the right below is a simplification of the one on the left.





When the relative clause contains some form of the verb *be* there is an alternate surface structure for it:

*This is my son who is the doctor: This is my son the doctor.*

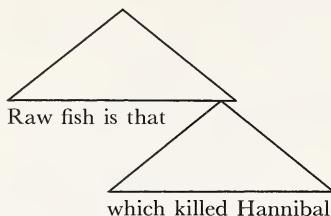
*Goa is a city which is in India: Goa is a city in India.*

*He has the room that is upstairs: He has the room upstairs.*

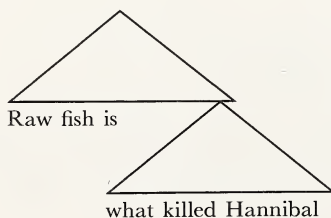
In each case the relative pronoun (*who, which, that*) and the verb (*is, was*) have been deleted, leaving behind an appositive noun phrase (*the doctor*), a prepositional phrase (*in India*), or an adverb (*upstairs*). If in place of one of those units the relative clause contains an adjective, a further change is called for. Simple deletion of the relative pronoun and verb would make *Socrates had a wife who was shrewish* into *\*Socrates had a wife shrewish*, which is un-English. To make that sentence grammatical, we must move the adjective in front of the noun: *Socrates had a shrewish wife*. Similarly, *the best answer* is related to *the answer which is best*; *curious cats*, to *cats that are curious*; and *raw fish*, to *fish which is raw*. Nearly all adjectives that come before nouns thus correspond to relative clauses; the pre-noun adjective and the corresponding relative clause have a common deep structure.



A slightly different kind of relative clause is illustrated by *Raw fish is what killed Hannibal*, the surface tree for which is on page 145. In this case we have the main clause *Raw fish is that*, and an embedded clause *That killed Hannibal*, which may first be combined to give a sentence like those we have already looked at: *Raw fish is that which killed Hannibal*.

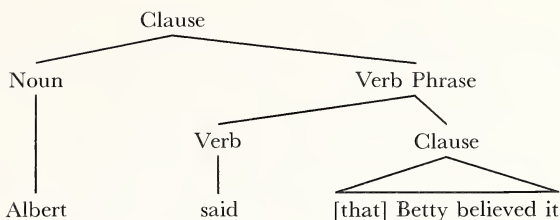


In this sentence the relative clause modifies the antecedent *that*, an **antecedent** being a noun or pronoun that goes before (*ante*-‘before,’ *cedere* ‘go’) a pronoun and identifies its meaning. As a further option, however, *that which* can be replaced by *what*, as though the relative clause had absorbed the antecedent and taken its place in the structure of the sentence:

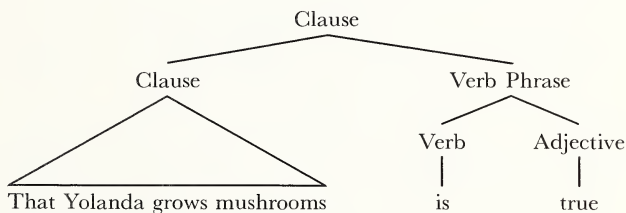


When the relative clause has thus absorbed its antecedent it is called an **indefinite relative clause**, as opposed to a **definite relative clause** with an antecedent.

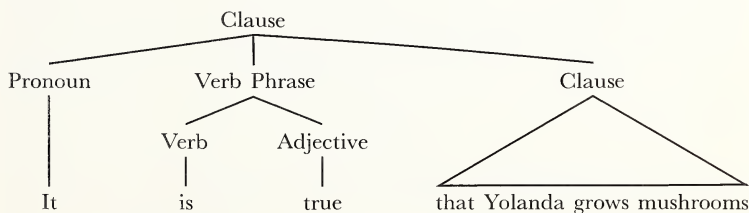
Another kind of embedding is illustrated by *Albert said that Betty believed it*, in which the main clause is *Albert said it* and the embedded clause is *Betty believed it*. The *it* of the main clause is deleted, and there is an optionally added *that* which is neither a demonstrative pronoun used to point out things (“*That* over there is the best one”) nor a relative pronoun (“The one *that*—or which—you got is good”), but is rather a subordinator whose only function is to introduce the embedded clause:



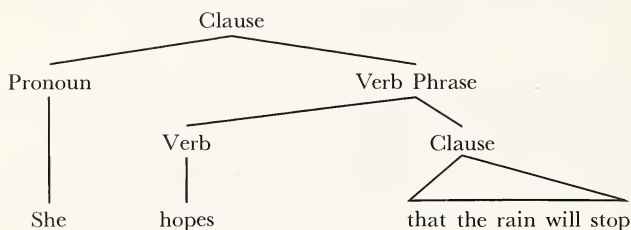
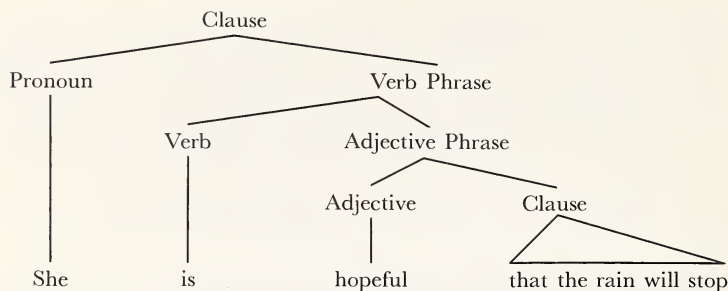
The embedded clause does not always delete the *it* of the main clause. If *it* is the subject—as for example in *It is true*—an embedded clause like *Yolanda grows mushrooms* can be handled in either of two ways. It may, as we have already seen, replace the *it*:



More commonly, however, the embedded clause is placed at the end of the main clause outside its hierarchical structure, and is then said to be **extra-posed**.

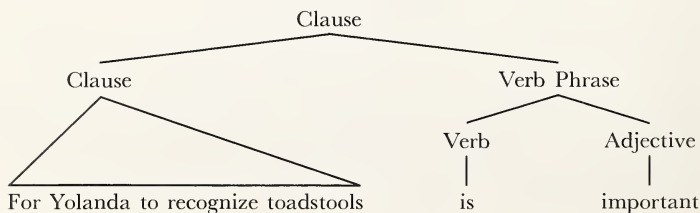


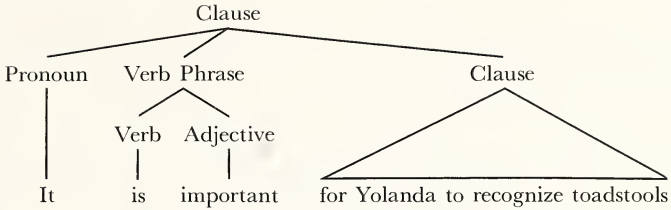
Another use for *that*-clauses can be seen in *She is hopeful that the rain will stop*, in which the embedded clause *The rain will stop* is a complement of the adjective *hopeful*, much as it is the complement of the verb in a sentence like *She hopes that the rain will stop*.



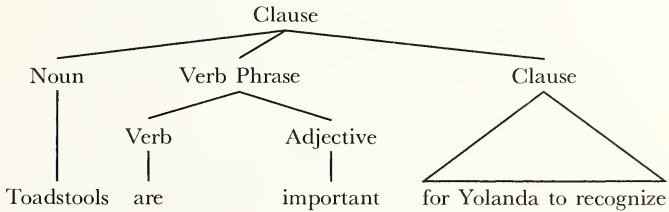
Indeed, since the two preceding sentences appear to mean approximately the same thing, they must have the same or at least highly similar deep conceptual structures, in spite of their surface grammatical differences.

Another form that embedded clauses can assume is the **infinitive construction**. The main clause *It is important* and the embedded clause *Yolanda should recognize toadstools* can be combined to yield *That Yolanda should recognize toadstools is important*, or more commonly with extraposing: *It is important that Yolanda should recognize toadstools*. The embedded clause can, however, take an entirely different form; instead of simply being introduced by *that*, it can be changed to the infinitive construction and occupy either of the positions:

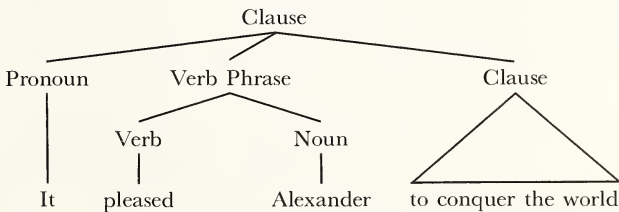




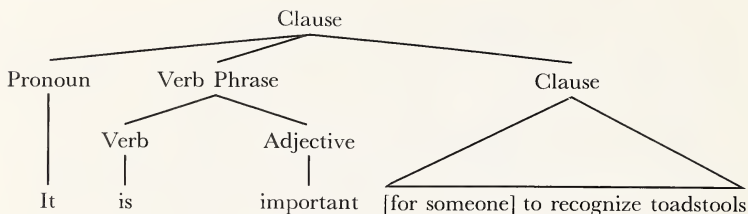
With infinitive constructions it is also possible for an embedded clause to be only partly extraposed. Thus, *toadstools* can be put in the position of *it* (with an appropriate change in the form of the verb), with the rest of the infinitive at the end of the sentence.



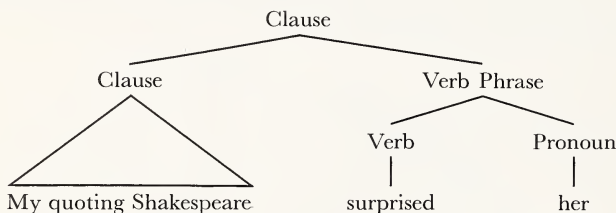
If the subject of the embedded clause is also found in the main clause, it is deleted, and so is the *for* that precedes. Thus, embedding *Alexander conquered the world* in the main clause *It pleased Alexander* yields not *It pleased Alexander for Alexander to conquer the world*, but rather:



The subject of the embedded clause may also be deleted if it is an indefinite pronoun like *someone*; thus the main clause *It is important* and the embedded clause *Someone should recognize toadstools* result in a sentence either with or without *for someone*:



Another form that embedded clauses may assume is the **gerund construction**. From the main clause *It surprised her* and the embedded clause *I quote Shakespeare*, we have the following sentence:



As with infinitive constructions, the subject of the embedded clause is omitted if it is an indefinite pronoun or is present in the main clause. Thus, embedding either *Someone quotes Shakespeare* or *Zuleika quotes Shakespeare* in *It bores Zuleika* may produce *Quoting Shakespeare bores Zuleika*, which is ambiguous as to whether Zuleika doesn't like to quote Shakespeare herself or whether she finds it tiresome for anyone to do so. Gerund constructions can also be used as the complement of a verb, as in *Yolanda loves watering her mushrooms*.

As a final example of embedding, there is the construction called a **subordinate clause**, such as the following:

|                              |   |                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yolanda waters her mushrooms | { | before the sun rises<br>where the ground is dry<br>because they need moisture<br>so that they will grow |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The subordinate clause, which consists of an embedded clause preceded by a subordinating conjunction like *before*, *where*, *because*, or *so that*, tells something about the circumstances of the main clause—time, place, cause, purpose, and so forth. There are many other kinds of embedding, but the examples already given suggest some of the complexity and richness of the process, which is perhaps the most powerful device in the repertory of grammar.

## Exercises

8. Identify the main clause and the embedded clause in each sentence.
  1. Polyphemus was a giant who had only one eye.
  2. To err is human.
  3. I think that we are in rats' alley.
  4. Alice dried herself after she climbed out of the pool.
  5. He wrote about Don Quixote's fighting the windmill.
  
9. For each of the following sentences, draw a tree diagram showing the constituent structure. Use a triangle for embedded clauses, but show the branching of the main clause.
  1. A worm is what crawled out of the apple.
  2. It is unlikely that it will crawl back in.
  3. It surprised Toby to meet the widow Wadman.
  4. Byron tried swimming the Hellespont.
  5. The sculptor who was named Pygmalion made a statue.
  
10. Make two different sentences out of each set of clauses by embedding them in different ways. Make any necessary adjustments in wording, including the substitution of pronouns, deletion of words, and re-ordering.
  1. The dodo became extinct. The dodo could not fly.
  2. Patrick Henry made a speech. The king called it seditious.
  3. A navigator sailed around the world. He was Portuguese.
  4. Linus sat in a pumpkin patch. He waited for the Great Pumpkin.
  5. He fights and runs away. He lives to fight another day.
  6. Somebody pleases him. It is easy.
  7. He should please someone. He is eager.
  8. The man was from Nantucket. The man kept his cash in a bucket.

## STRUCTURAL SIGNALS

Since neither the deep nor the surface hierarchical structure of a sentence is immediately obvious—we do not normally make our sentences with trees attached to them—how do we know what that structure is? What are the grammatical signals that we use to express ourselves and to interpret what others say? Morpheme sequence is one obvious signal because units next to one another are likely to be hierarchically associated, though we have seen



that they do not have to be. Other signals are affixes, structural words, intonation, and major class membership. We will look in more detail at these five signals, beginning with the one we have already briefly examined.

The **sequence** in which words and other grammatical units are arranged is one of those ubiquitous facts about language that we are often likely to overlook because they are so obvious. Since speech is something that goes on in time, morphemes must come in some temporal sequence, and our written representation of those morphemes must come in some linear sequence. Because a sequential order among morphemes and words is inescapable, all languages use it to signal meaning. There is no language in which the arrangement of units is insignificant. If there were, you could take one of the sentences of that language, divide it into morphemes, write each morpheme on a separate slip of paper, mix all the slips in a hat, and then draw them out in a random order to make a sentence. The sentence you thus produced would not only be a good sentence in our mythical language, it would mean exactly the same thing as the original one and exactly the same thing as any other sentence constructed of the same morphemes in any other random order. No such language exists, because it would be inconceivably wasteful not to make grammatical use of the sequential order which is necessarily present, whether it is used or not. Language is not so profligate as that.

Although all languages make some use of order, it is true that they vary widely in what use they make of it. In English we are accustomed to order as a signal for certain kinds of meaning. For example, the same action and the same participants are involved in the two sentences *Worms ate Yorick* and *Yorick ate worms*. But the participants have different roles in the action, and that difference is signaled only by the variation in word order, which consequently makes a very great difference in meaning, or at least Yorick and the worms would certainly have thought so. Similarly the difference in word order between *There is an alligator in your bath* and *Is there an alligator in your bath* may be the only thing that lets us know we are being given some information in the first case and are being asked for information in the second.

On the other hand, there are some sentences in English in which differences of word order are not so crucial. For example, the following: *Leave on a light* and *Leave a light on*; *Consequently he left*, *He consequently left*, and *He left consequently*; *She has curly, blond hair* and *She has blond, curly hair*. In these sentences the change in sequence produces no such radical change in meaning as that in the sentence about Yorick or in the one about the alligator. As we saw earlier, they would have the same conceptual, although different surface, structures. There may be a difference in what our attention focuses on, or there may be subtle differences in effect caused by the variation in sentence rhythm (*Léave a light ón* versus *Léave ón a light*). However, the

sentences in each group are equivalent in what they say about the world, and they are consequently said to have **free word order**. Notice that “free” order does not mean that the morphemes can have any random arrangement. It merely indicates that there is some situation that can be referred to by more than one arrangement of the same words. In English, free order is more restricted than it is in some other languages, such as Latin.

We all know that in English *Dog bites man* is not news, but *Man bites dog* is. The four other possible arrangements of those words (*\*Bites dog man*, *\*Bites man dog*, *\*Dog man bites*, and *\*Man dog bites*) are neither news nor not news; they are not normal English at all, and they fail to tell us clearly who does the biting and who gets bitten. The Latin equivalent of the unnewsworthy *Dog bites man* might be *Canis hominem mordet*, but an important difference between English and Latin is that every possible order of the three Latin words, including *Hominem canis mordet*, reports the same event. Not that all possible orders are completely equivalent in Latin—they are not. But you cannot change the basic meaning of this particular Latin sentence by reordering the words, as you can the English. To get the change of meaning we produce in English by rearranging the words to *Man bites dog*, in Latin we must change the endings of the words, namely to *Canem homo mordet*, the linear order being irrelevant. The kind of grammatical meaning signaled by word order in one language is signaled by affixes in the other.

An **affix**, which can come either before its base as a **prefix** or after its base as a **suffix**, can also be classified as either **inflectional** or **derivational**. In English the inflectional affixes are the four endings we add to verbs—for example, those in the inflected forms of the verb *show*: *show-s*, *show-ed*, *show-n*, *show-ing*—and the ending we add to nouns to make them plural—for example, *pen-s*. Other English suffixes that are sometimes called inflectional are the *'s* we use after noun phrases to show possession, as in *the old man's*; the endings we add to some adjectives, like *loud*: *loud-er*, *loud-est*; and the *-ly* we use to make adverbs out of adjectives, such as *loud-ly*. Other affixes in English, including all prefixes and most suffixes, are derivational.

Inflectional affixes are much less important in our language than they are in some others, like Latin, and indeed they are less important in present-day English than they used to be, as Chapter 9 will show. Yet, they may sometimes be crucial. For example, it is only the inflected form of the verb that tells us that two quite different sorts of information are being asked for in *Which one have you?* and *Which one has you?* If we are talking about boa constrictors, the difference between the two questions is great. Perhaps because we are reluctant to depend on inflection when such significant differences are involved, most speakers would rather ask *Which one have you got?* and *Which one has got you?* thus using word order as well as inflection to signal the meanings.

Although inflectional endings are relatively unimportant in English, other

affixes play a major role in our grammatical system. *He got helpful* and *He got help* are quite different in grammar, although only the affix *-ful* distinguishes them in form. In the first sentence *got* is a linking verb that means 'became' and is followed by a subject complement; in the second sentence *got* is a transitive verb that means 'obtained' and is followed by a direct object. We can deduce such facts because of the affix *-ful*.

Affixes help to signal grammatical meaning chiefly by identifying the **part of speech**. Words are put in various classes according to the way they are used in a sentence. Thus, *novel, theater, news, humor, man, race, oatmeal, action, truth, lightning*, and a great many other words are alike in that they can all be used in the same position in a sentence like *The \_\_\_\_\_ is good*. When we say that words belong to the same part of speech we mean they can be grammatically substituted for one another in many sentences. A part of speech is thus a class of words that can be used in the same position.

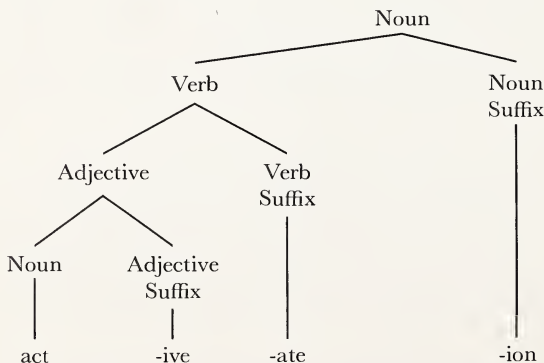
Many affixes mark a word as belonging to a particular part of speech and may convert the form to which they are added from one part to another. Thus, *-ment* changes a verb like *entertain* into a noun like *entertainment*, *-ize* changes an adjective like *final* into a verb like *finalize*, and *-less* changes a noun like *mind* into an adjective like *mindless*. It is even possible to add several affixes one after the other to build up increasingly complex forms.

*act* + *-ive* = *active*

*active* + *-ate* = *activate*

*activate* + *-ion* = *activation*

Such layering of suffixes produces hierarchical structure on the word level, which we could show by means of a tree.



Even longer words can be built up in this way. Instead of stopping with *activation*, we could have gone on adding suffixes to produce a form like *activationally*, which has a clearly definable meaning, although it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the word would be useful.

Derivational affixes, however, do not always mark the part of speech. A prefix like *semi-* can begin either an adjective, like *semiprivate*, or a noun, like *semivowel*. Moreover, because English words often shift from one part of speech to another, a derivational suffix occasionally turns up in odd uses. For instance, *-ion* usually signals nouns, and *-able*, adjectives; but in *Overcrowding of school classes occasioned the use of portables* we have a verb in *-ion* and a noun in *-able*.

Inflectional affixes, on the other hand, regularly mark the part of speech. A word that includes an inflectional affix is called an **inflected form**, and a list of all the inflected forms of a word is a **paradigm**. Words with similar paradigms always belong to the same part of speech. Modern English has so few inflectional endings that English grammars need not spend much time on them. Other languages, however, have many more of these affixes and use them to signal a wide variety of grammatical meanings. In such languages **declension**—the inflection of nouns, pronouns and adjectives—and **conjugation**—the inflection of verbs—are grammatically important.

Although suffixes are still important as a grammatical signal in our language, we have come to rely less on them and more on word order and **structural words**. In *He gave the dog a bone* the role the dog plays in the action is signaled by word order alone, whereas in *He gave a bone to the dog* the structural word *to* helps in signaling the same information. Structural, or **function**, words help to indicate how other words in the sentence are related to one another. They are the minor parts of speech that are nevertheless most important for signaling grammatical structure. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are the four major parts of speech. All other kinds of words are minor parts or structural words—for example, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, exclamations, limiting adjectives like *this*, *few*, and *both*, conjunctive adverbs, adverbs of degree, modals like *will*, *can*, and *ought*, the expletive *there*, and a good many others.

Minor words differ from the major parts of speech in some important respects. First, their total number is much smaller than the total number of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Moreover, they are relatively stable. Although new nouns come into our vocabulary with great ease, as do to a lesser degree new verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, the minor parts of speech are resistant to change. Altogether there are not more than a few hundred such words in the language, and new ones are rarely added. Each minor word class is consequently small in size; indeed there are several that consist of a single word. On the other hand, although their total number is small,

they occur with great frequency. The most common words in English are *the, and, to, of, a, in, I, it, for, that*, and other structural words. According to one recent study,<sup>5</sup> a structural word like *the* occurs nearly two hundred times more often than such a common adjective as *big*, and *of* is four hundred times more frequent than a verb like *belong*. Probably the most common word in normal colloquial English is *I*, whose high frequency is due only in part to its status as a structural word. Some of its popularity is attributable to its being our favorite subject, but the other most common words do not have that explanation.

It is sometimes said that the minor words differ from the major parts of speech in the kind of meaning they express—that nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, the so-called content words, have “lexical” meaning, whereas structural words have only “grammatical” meaning. But it is doubtful that such a distinction can be made in any thoroughgoing way. It is true that the major parts of speech seem to carry the burden of the message in most sentences. For example, in *John hopefully asked Mary for her hand in marriage, but she would not accept him*, the seven content words *John, hopefully, asked, Mary, hand, marriage*, and *accept* can convey the total message much better than the eight structural words *for, her, in, but, she, would, not*, and *him*. However, the meaning of the structural word *not* seems fairly important to the content of the sentence. And indeed the combination *would not accept*, including two structural words and one content word, is equivalent in the foregoing sentence to the single verb *refused*.

It is convenient to distinguish the four major parts of speech from the twenty or so minor classes of structural words mainly because of the importance the minor classes have as signals of grammatical structure. There is, however, no absolute difference between them.

It is true, however, that most structural words serve two distinct ends. In addition to whatever sense they may have, they tell us something about the meaning and use of other words in the sentence—that is, they signal grammatical structure. *He wanted to watch* and *He wanted a watch* are clearly about different things. In one sentence *watch* is a verb meaning ‘observe,’ whereas in the other sentence it is a noun meaning ‘timepiece.’ If we ask ourselves how it is that we know about the part of speech and meaning of *watch* in the two sentences, we will have to conclude that we have inferred what we know from *to* in one sentence and from *a* in the other. That it is the structural words that keep the two meanings apart becomes clear if we consider what happens when *to* and *a* cease to be distinct in sound. If we are talking at a normally fast pace, we are likely to pronounce both of these structural words as a schwa, so that the two sentences become identical in

<sup>5</sup>Henry Kučera and W. Nelson Francis, *Computational Analysis of Present-Day American English* (Providence, 1967).



sound. We might represent them impressionistically as *He wantada watch*. This spelling is of course illiterate, but the pronunciation it stands for is a usual one. It is informal, but not particularly “careless” or “sloppy,” as the spelling may suggest. The thing to notice is that if either sentence is thus pronounced in isolation, it is no longer possible to tell which kind of *watch* is meant. If the distinction between the signals *to* and *a* is erased, the isolated sentences become ambiguous. Of course, if we have some context to refer the sentence to—either more sentences or a situation—we can probably sort out the meanings, but the sentence remains potentially ambiguous.

A few structural words have no use other than signaling grammatical structure because they lack any individual meaning. Thus *do* in *What do you know?* fills a required position in the clause and helps to mark it as a question, but has no readily identifiable meaning of its own. The same thing is true of *to* in *He wants to go* and of *that* in *He said that he went*; they are referentially meaningless but fill a structural position. Such items are called **empty morphemes** because they have no semantic content. Most structural words, however, have a meaning that contrasts with that of other structural words. Thus, the prepositions *to* in *He made a contribution to his son* and *for* in *He made a contribution for his son* both indicate how the son is related to the contribution, but the relationship is different in the two sentences because the prepositions have their own meanings.

Structural words, word order, and affixes are the three most important signals of grammatical structure. English relies heavily on them, particularly on the first two. The remaining signals—intonation and major class membership—though sometimes crucial, are generally of less importance as structural signals.

**Intonation**, which has various uses including the expression of emotional attitudes, is present in all sentences as an accompaniment to other signals, but sometimes it is the sole clue to grammatical structure. Usually we indicate a question by placing the verb at the beginning of the sentence—as in *Is there an alligator in my bath?*—or by a structural word like *what* in *What is in my bath?* But we can also use intonation alone to show that we are asking rather than telling. As we saw in Chapter 3, a statement like <sup>2</sup>*There’s an alligator in my bath*<sup>1</sup> would usually be spoken with the voice fairly high pitched on the first syllable of *alligator* (the exact height of the pitch depending on the excitement of the speaker), and with a gradual lowering of the pitch during the rest of the sentence until it is quite low on *bath*. We can represent intonation by using numbers to indicate pitch levels, as explained in Chapter 3, and shown above. If, however, instead of falling from *al-* to *bath* the pitch rises so that it is very high indeed by the end of the sentence, the result is a question: <sup>2</sup>*There’s an alligator in my bath.*<sup>3</sup> Here intonation alone signals the kind of sentence we are dealing with.

A somewhat different example is *He left quickly* versus *He left, probably*.



In the first sentence *quickly* tells how he left and is called an **adverb of manner**. *Probably* is very different; as a **sentence adverb** it refers not just to the action of leaving, but also to the fact that he left. Thus, we can say *That he left is probable*, but not *\*That he left is quick*. The difference between the two structures is signaled by the fact that *He left quickly* is a single pitch unit, whereas *He left, probably* is two such units, the boundary being marked in writing by the comma. The same structural difference can be seen in *He died happily*, that is, 'He died in a happy manner,' and *He died, happily* 'The fact that he died is happy.'

Intonation functions in a similar way to distinguish what are traditionally called **restrictive** and **nonrestrictive relative clauses**—for example, *The Japanese who are industrious will prosper* and *The Japanese, who are industrious, will prosper*. The first sentence, with the restrictive clause, means 'Some Japanese are industrious and will prosper'; the second, with its nonrestrictive clause, means rather 'All Japanese are industrious and will prosper.' The difference in pronunciation is the absence versus the presence of pitch terminals or pauses, which divide the utterance into parts and are spelled by the commas.

Other sentences, however, have intonation patterns that cannot be represented in their spelling. For instance, the written sentence *The industrious Japanese will prosper* is ambiguous with respect to the restrictive and the nonrestrictive meanings of *industrious*. We cannot tell whether the sentence is talking about all or only some Japanese. In speech, on the other hand, it is possible to make that distinction by intonation. If we put a high pitch on the second syllable of *industrious* and lower it before *Japanese*, the result is a restrictive adjective—we are talking about only some Japanese, the industrious ones:

<sup>2</sup>*The in<sup>3</sup>dustrial Japanese will prosper<sup>1</sup>.*

If we begin the high pitch on *industrious* and sustain it through *Japanese*, the result is a nonrestrictive adjective—we are talking about all Japanese, and they are industrious:

<sup>2</sup>*The in<sup>3</sup>dustrial Japa<sup>3</sup>nese will prosper<sup>1</sup>.*

Intonation has several uses in English—such as marking emphasis and expressing emotion—but, as we have seen in Chapter 3, it also signals grammatical structures like questions, sentence adverbs, and nonrestrictive modifiers.

Finally, there is the clue to structure afforded by the **major part of speech** to which a word belongs. Because English words tend to be used as various parts of speech with no change in pronunciation, the usefulness of this signal is limited. If we can be sure, however, that a word is a noun or a verb, that fact will often tell us something about the grammatical structure in which the word appears. So we know that there is a difference between the structure

of *He's gone to town* and that of *He's gone to eat*, despite the similarity in word order. The first sentence answers the question *Where has he gone?* and its *to* is a preposition, for which we could substitute others like *from*, *around*, *through*. The second sentence answers *Why has he gone?* and its *to* is the infinitive marker, for which nothing else can be substituted. To be sure, most English speakers could not verbalize all this, but they would feel "intuitively" that *He's gone to town* is somehow different from *He's gone to eat*—that *to town* and *to eat* are not parallel. A linguistic intuition is a dim awareness of a distinction habitually observed in our use of language. In this case the signal that the structures of the two sentences differ is that *eat* is a verb, whereas *town* is a noun. *He's gone to rest* is structurally ambiguous because we cannot be sure from *rest* itself whether it is a noun or verb. On the other hand *He's gone to his rest* and *He's gone to rest his weary limbs* are both clear because other signals identify the part of speech of *rest*. If most words belonged to only one part of speech, their class membership would be a more useful clue than it is. In fact, however, English regularly uses words in a variety of ways, and when occasion demands we can press almost any word into service as a noun or verb.

In most sentences the grammatical signals overlap one another to such an extent that we are in no doubt about any word's function. However, the language of newspaper headlines, in which many structural words are omitted, sometimes produces ambiguities because we cannot decide which major class some word belongs to. Thus, *Whiskey Still Illegal* announces either continuing prohibition or a law against moonshine, depending on whether *still* is an adverb or a noun. For the most part, however, there is so much redundancy among grammatical signals that we do not have to know the class of a word as a separate bit of information. In the following bit of Jabberwocky we can identify the part of speech of every "word" and describe the structure of the sentence depending solely on morpheme sequence, structural words, and affixes:

*The coapish panxes were ubbling carbly.*

There would be no way to tell the part of speech of the isolated word *ubble*; but given its position in the sentence, its use with the structural word *were*, and the affix *-ing*, we know it must be a verb. Jabberwocky preserves correct structural signals but uses nonsense syllables for the base morphemes of the major parts of speech. The name and the idea for this nonsense language came from *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which Alice found a poem that began:

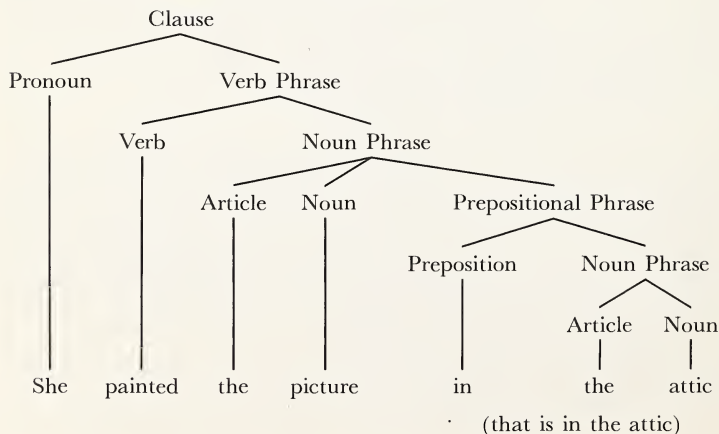
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
 All mimsy were the borogoves,  
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

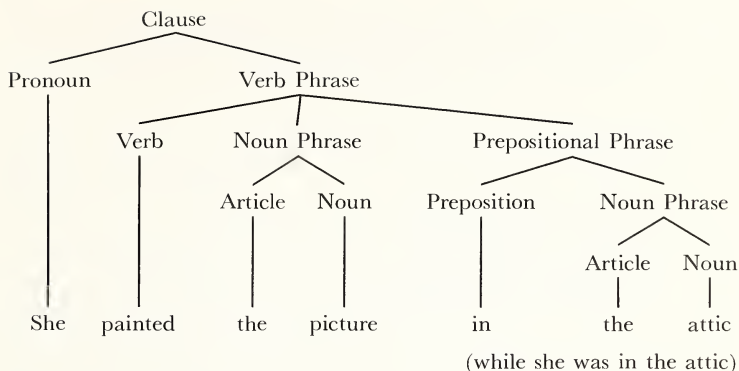
. . .

"It seems very pretty," she said when she had finished it, "but it's *rather* hard to understand!" (You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are!"

The ideas that the poem filled Alice's head with were the meanings of the grammatical structures. Her problem was that the lexically important items happen to be nonsense. In this poem Lewis Carroll was poking fun at obscure verse as well as at people who never admit they fail to understand anything, even when it is nonsense; but he also demonstrated an important fact about English grammar, namely that we need not know the meaning of a word to recognize the class it belongs to and the place it fills in the structure of a sentence. It is for this reason that the traditional definitions of nouns as words that name things and of verbs as words that name actions are not so much wrong as irrelevant. A word is not a noun because it names a thing; rather it names a thing because it is a noun. That is, we first recognize a word as a noun because it has the appropriate position, structural words, and affixes to signal that part of speech; having recognized the word as a noun, we know what it names is in the category of "things."

Even in normal English there are, to be sure, times when all the signals fail us because they are insufficient or unclear, and then we have examples of genuine ambiguity in grammar because we are uncertain of the structure. An example is *She painted the picture in the attic*, which can mean either 'She painted the picture that is in the attic' or 'She painted the picture while she was in the attic.' In the first case the sentence tells us which picture it is that she painted; in the second, it tells where the painting took place. The two meanings correspond to different trees:





Although the two expressions are composed of the same words, the structural relations among them are not the same. Consequently, they are different sentences that happen to be pronounced alike even though the grammatical signals fail to show the difference.

## Exercises

11. Make two normal English sentences out of each of the following groups by combining the words in different ways. Be prepared to tell how your sentences differ in meaning, when they do.
  1. have jobs quit their those workmen
  2. bit cat dog seldom the the
  3. drink first guests homebrew our this
  4. and bull charged down head his put the
  5. drank fruit half he punch sweet the
12. For each of the following words, list the suffixes and tell what parts of speech they form.
 

|              |             |                |                |
|--------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. falsehood | 4. denial   | 7. grayishness | 10. cumulative |
| 2. whiten    | 5. graphic  | 8. moisturize  | 11. afterward  |
| 3. pulsate   | 6. lawfully | 9. formality   | 12. purify     |
13. What do the italicized words signal about the structural meaning of their sentences?
  1. She likes *a* race. / She likes *to* race.
  2. He cut *the* quick. / He cut *very* quick.

3. Ship *the* sails today. / *The* ship sails today.
4. An expert shot *was* in town. / An expert *was* shot in town.
5. He made *a* book. / He made book.

14. List words that will substitute grammatically for each italicized structural word:

1. She has *a* book.
2. They went *to* the house.
3. That is *very* good.
4. *Although* she is ready, we will go.
5. He *will* not try, *will* he?

15. How do the following paired sentences differ in pronunciation and in meaning?

1. It's raining outside. / It's raining outside?
2. He answered the question certainly. / He answered the question, certainly.
3. She is a pretty eager girl. / She is a pretty, eager girl.
4. Fraternity men whose grades are always above average are unusual. / Fraternity men, whose grades are always above average, are unusual.
5. He made a good shortstop. / He made a good, short stop.

16. Underline the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in the following sentences and write the name of the part of speech over each.

1. The skiers came alternately slaloming and schussing down the hillside.
2. A poltergeist constantly haunted the old Victorian house.
3. She wore a mod dress with a psychedelic design.
4. Nowadays he seldom reads the daily newspaper carefully.
5. But me no buts, but do it.

17. The following examples of Jabberwocky are from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. For each of the italicized words substitute an English word that makes sense. Be prepared to explain how you decided what part of speech to substitute in each instance.

1. And may his *tarpitch dilute* not give him *chromitis* (p. 232).
2. Have your little *sintalks* in the *dunk* of *subjunctions* (p. 269).
3. As you *wrinkle wryghtly*, *bully bluedomer*, it's a *suirsite's stircus haunting hesteries* (p. 319).

4. And it *marinned* down his *gargantast trombsathletic* like the *ma-rousters* of the *gulpstroom* (p. 319).
5. Your *sows tin* the *topple* (p. 321).

## SOME WORD CLASSES

In the preceding section we saw that there are four major parts of speech—noun, verb, adjective, and adverb—and a number of minor parts, or structural words. But things are a bit more complicated than that. In fact, each of the major parts of speech has a number of subclasses. A word is not simply a noun or adjective; it is a noun or adjective of a particular kind. Thus, most adjectives can be put either before a noun (as an **attributive adjective**) or after some form of the verb *be* (as a **predicate adjective**): *the ancient mariner* or *The mariner was ancient*. Some, however, are found in only one of the two positions: *the main reason*, but not *\*The reason was main*; and on the other hand, *The building was afire*, but not *\*the afire building*. It is obvious that *ancient*, *main*, and *afire* do not enter into quite the same combinations. Furthermore, most adjectives can be compared, although some take the endings *-er* and *-est*, while others use the words *more* and *most*: *happy*, *happier*, *happiest*, but *comic*, *more comic*, *most comic*. Still other adjectives can hardly be compared at all, for instance *above* in *the above statement*. *\*The abover statement* is completely impossible, and *\*The more above statement* is peculiar at best.

Some adjectives, such as *aware* and *important*, are followed by complements very much as verbs are. We can say *aware that he is going* like *know that he is going* and *aware of it* like *know of it*. Furthermore, we say *important to go* or *important that we go* much like *hope to go* or *hope that we go*. Also verblike in their complements are those adjectives that are followed by noun phrases, such as *worth a million dollars*, which is like *costs a million dollars* except that *worth* is an adjective and *cost* a verb. Not all adjectives take complements like the ones above, but those that do are a special subtype—or rather several subtypes depending on what sort of complement they take.

Still another distinction among adjectives is that different kinds may require a fixed order when they modify the same noun. For example, the modifiers in the phrase *all the many beautiful French girls* must come in that precise order because no other arrangement is idiomatic English. On the other hand, the modifiers in *dour, quarrelsome, stubborn, surly, morose teachers* can come in any order at all. Since *dour*, *quarrelsome*, *stubborn*, *surly*, and *morose* can all substitute for one another in any order, we know they are the same type of adjective, whereas *all*, *the*, *many*, *beautiful*, and *French* are different kinds of modifiers because they cannot replace one another. Indeed, the latter



five words have such differences among them that we may hesitate to say they are all adjectives. In a number of cases it is hard to be sure whether we should call a word an adjective or not—for example *corner* in *the corner store*, *running* in *the running water*, and *upstairs* in *the room upstairs*.

The truth of the matter is that the traditional notion of “adjective” is a broad one because it lumps together a good many sorts of words that are in some important ways quite different from one another. A finer, more detailed description of the parts of speech recognizes not just one group of words called adjectives, but a number of partly overlapping categories, like those above.

Much the same thing is true of the other major word classes. For instance, there are several kinds of nouns in English. **Countable** or **unit nouns** can be either singular or plural, and when singular they have to be used with a modifier like *the* or *a*: *He lives in the (or a) tower*, not *\*He lives in tower*. **Uncountable** or **mass nouns**, on the other hand, are always singular and are used either with a modifier like *the* or with no modifier at all: *He heard the news* or *He heard news*, but not *\*He heard a news* or *\*He heard newses*. Furthermore, unit nouns when plural are used with modifiers like *many* or *fewer*, whereas mass nouns take modifiers like *much* or *less*: *many spots*, not *\*much spots*, but *much machinery*, not *\*many machinery*. **Proper nouns** are regularly used without any kind of modifier: *She works in New York*, not *\*She works in the (or a) New York*. Some unit nouns have no singular forms: *He put on his trousers*, not *\*his trouser*; others, though singular in form, can take plural verbs and pronouns: either *The group has gone its own way* (collectively) or *The group have gone their own ways* (individually). It was noted earlier that **human nouns** take the relative pronoun *who*, while **nonhuman nouns** take *which*. Nouns are also either **animate** or **inanimate**; the former are required as the subject of some verbs and as the object of others: *The girl likes the dress because it flatters her*, not *\*The dress likes the girl because she flatters it*.

There are also many verb classes. Some verbs must have a noun, pronoun, or adjective following them. Thus, it is impossible to say *\*He frequented* or *\*She seemed*; we must follow these two verbs with complements: *He frequented dark alleys* and *She seemed apprehensive*. Other verbs never take a complement: *The sore festered*, not *\*The sore festered his arm*. Verbs like *frequented*, which require a noun or pronoun after them, are **transitive verbs**; those like *seemed*, which can be followed by adjectives or in some cases by nouns, are called **linking verbs**; and those like *festered*, which have no complement, are **intransitive**. Some verbs belong to more than one class. Thus, we can say either *He finished his work* or just *He finished* and, with a slight change of meaning in the verb, either *She was flying* or *She was flying a plane*.

Adverbs have variety also. If we try to put adverbs into a sentence like *He plays the sitar*, we will discover that some, like *beautifully*, fit naturally

only at the end of the sentence. Other arrangements, such as *Beautifully he plays the sitar*, are possible, but they seem “poetic” or somehow unusual. Other adverbs, like *often*, can go either at the end or between the subject and the verb (*He plays the sitar often* or *He often plays the sitar*) without seeming unusual in either position. Still others, like *never*, must come between subject and verb (*He never plays the sitar*) if the sentence is to be idiomatic. And finally, some adverbs, like *consequently*, can be found in any of three positions: *Consequently, he plays the sitar*; *He, consequently, plays the sitar*; and *He plays the sitar, consequently*. On the basis of the positions in which they occur naturally, we can set up at least four subclasses of adverbs (called after their characteristic meanings or functions **adverbs of manner**, **adverbs of frequency**, **negative adverbs**, and **sentence adverbs**), but as you might guess there are more than just four such subclasses. There are also **adverbs of time**, like *now*, and **adverbs of place**, like *here*. When adverbs of manner, place, and time occur together at the end of a sentence, they usually come in that order: *He plays beautifully here now*.

Nouns, verbs, and adverbs are like adjectives in that it is easily possible to divide them into smaller word classes. It may also be difficult to know which of these traditional parts of speech a word belongs to. Is *good* an adjective or a noun in *The good is desirable for its own sake*? Is *still* an adverb or an adjective in *He stood still*? Is *up* a verb or something else in *He up and clobbered the other guy*? These questions have no obvious answers. At least grammarians have not been able to agree on them.

From what has been said thus far, it should be clear that there is not and cannot be a fixed number of parts of speech, because the four major classes can all be subdivided into smaller groups. How many word classes we recognize depends partly on how detailed we want our grammatical description to be. A part of speech ought to include all words that are alike in their use, but we can set up many or few such classes, depending on how much alike we want the members to be. A grammatical description can include a large amount of information, like a detailed blueprint of a building that shows every particular the user might need to be aware of. Or it can merely approximate the gross features, like a rough sketch that ignores fine points and exact dimensions. There is no way to say in the abstract which is the better description of a house—a complete set of blueprints or a pencil and watercolor sketch. Which is better depends on what the description is to be used for. If you want to construct the house, you had better use the blueprints; but if you want to give someone a general impression of what the building will look like when it is finished, the sketch may be better. Grammatical description is much like that. For some purposes we need highly precise, detailed, and complete grammars. For other purposes we need grammars that are more superficial and general.

If a linguist is trying to write a description of English that can be fed into

a computer for use in translating Russian, he will want an extremely specific one. The machine will need to be told how to handle every detail of the language if a reliable and readable translation is to be produced. In teaching English to foreigners, on the other hand, we can make do with a much less detailed grammar. All human beings have an intelligence that permits them to learn things they have not been explicitly taught; consequently, they need to be instructed in less detail than does a computer, which for all its accomplishments is no more than an incredibly speedy moron. A linguistic description for native speakers can be even less detailed than one intended for foreigners, since the native speaker already knows English. We study the grammar of our own tongue not to learn the language, but to learn something about language. Two quite different sorts of knowledge are involved.

### Exercises

18. The adjectives below are shown either in attributive or predicate position. Which can be used in both positions?

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. The <i>principal</i> reason | 5. The man is <i>alive</i> .     |
| 2. The <i>important</i> reason | 6. The party was <i>lively</i> . |
| 3. The <i>mere</i> fact        | 7. The woman was <i>aloof</i> .  |
| 4. The <i>lonely</i> guard     | 8. The girl was <i>alone</i> .   |

19. What kind of nouns are the following: countable (*C*) or mass (*M*)? Mark each with the appropriate letter.

- |              |          |             |            |
|--------------|----------|-------------|------------|
| 1. bottle    | 3. guess | 5. molasses | 7. spoon   |
| 2. furniture | 4. luck  | 6. road     | 8. traffic |

20. What kind of verbs are the following: transitive (*T*), intransitive (*I*), or linking (*L*)? Mark each with the appropriate letter.

- |            |          |            |          |
|------------|----------|------------|----------|
| 1. become  | 3. endow | 5. glimmer | 7. seem  |
| 2. correct | 4. fish  | 6. like    | 8. stoop |

21. For each of the adverbs below, indicate what positions it can normally occupy. Write the appropriate letter after the adverbs.

(A)                      (B)                      (C)

\_\_\_\_\_ he has \_\_\_\_\_ done it \_\_\_\_\_

- |           |                 |              |         |
|-----------|-----------------|--------------|---------|
| 1. hardly | 3. nevertheless | 5. scarcely  | 7. too  |
| 2. just   | 4. right        | 6. therefore | 8. well |

22. There can be difficulty in deciding which of the traditional eight parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction, and interjection) the following italicized words belong to. Which do you think each is, and why?

1. She is *friends* with George.
2. He is *about* to leave.
3. The actress gave a *polished* performance.
4. He drives *too* fast.
5. They built a *stone* wall.
6. She stood *nearest* the fireplace.
7. *Considering* the time, we need to hurry.
8. Zuleika wore the black dress, and Xanthippe the red *one*.
9. This is the house *where* she lives.
10. *Help!*

## SOME GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

Because each part of speech can be subdivided in various ways into smaller categories, the grammatical structures made up of those parts of speech can also be subdivided. For example, the following clauses are all made of a noun phrase, a verb, and another noun phrase, and thus apparently have the same structure:

- (1) *The girls watched the show.*
- (2) *A man broke the window.*
- (3) *A hobo cooked the stew.*
- (4) *The dog had some fleas.*
- (5) *The hat cost fifty dollars.*

It is obvious that these five clauses are in a general way alike. But it may not be obvious at first sight that they are in some particular ways quite unlike. For the first three there are equivalent clauses of the following forms:

*The show was watched by the girls. = The girls watched the show.*  
*The window was broken by a man. = A man broke the window.*  
*The stew was cooked by a hobo. = A hobo cooked the stew.*

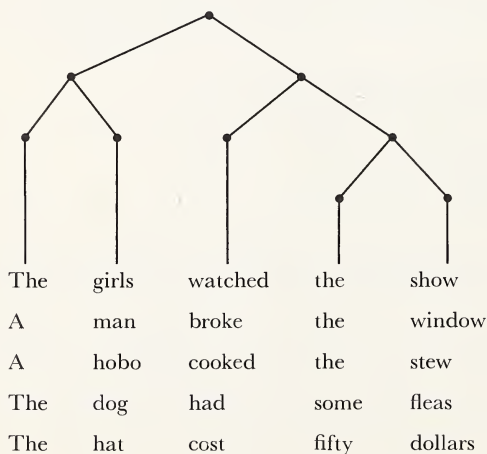
There are, however, no clauses of the kind

*\*Some fleas were had by the dog.*  
*\*Fifty dollars were cost by the hat.*

In spite of the superficial resemblance among them, clauses (4) and (5) are different in kind from (1), (2), and (3). They lack a corresponding passive.

Moreover, (4) and (5) differ from one another in that we can say *The dog had them* (meaning ‘fleas’), but not *\*The hat cost them* (meaning by *them* ‘fifty dollars’). The first three clauses also differ from one another. In addition to saying *The girls watched the show* we can say merely *The girls watched*, leaving the complement, or second noun phrase, unexpressed. But we cannot drop the complement from *A man broke the window* to produce *\*A man broke*, which is un-English. What we can do instead is drop the original subject and move the old complement around to take its place, thus: *The window broke*. In fact there is a quite different relationship between the verb and its accompanying noun phrases in these two sentences. In *A man broke the window* it is really the window that does the breaking, while the man’s role in the drama is to cause the event; the sentence is thus equivalent to *A man made the window break*. In *The girls watched the show*, however, it is the girls who do the watching, not the show; so there is no possibility of saying *\*The girls made the show watch*. What is distinctive about the third clause, *A hobo cooked the stew*, is that it shares the peculiarities of both (1) and (2). We can drop the complement to make *A hobo cooked* or we can move the complement into the position of the old subject to make *The stew cooked*.

Superficially, sentences (1) through (5) have the same hierarchical structure, which could be represented by trees with the same pattern of branching, as below:



For the most part the nodes would have the same labels as well. The node above *watched*, *broke*, *cooked*, *had*, and *cost* might be labeled simply “Verb,” or if greater detail is wanted, it might be labeled “Transitive Verb.” If still greater detail is desired, however, that node will have to be differently labeled

for each of the five verbs, because they belong to different subtypes, depending on whether they have passives (like *watched*, *broke*, and *cooked*), can take pronoun complements (like all except *cost*), have deletable complements (like *watched* and *cooked*), or have subject-replacing complements (like *broke* and *cooked*), as we have already seen. The words in these five sentences group together in similar ways, so their trees have the same branching pattern; but since the verbs belong to different categories, we do not really have the same things grouped together. Thus their structure, though superficially the same, is in a deeper sense quite different.

The easiest way to recognize the differences between sentences that are superficially alike is to see how they relate to other sentences. For example, we have already seen that a sentence like *He broke the window* is related to one like *The window broke*. Both are good English, and the first implies the second, that is, if we know he broke the window, then we also know that the window broke. There are a good many other verbs in English that permit the same kind of relationship to exist between two sentences, for example:

|                               |                             |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>If he flew the plane</i>   | <i>then the plane flew.</i> |
| <i>He burned the leaves.</i>  | <i>The leaves burned.</i>   |
| <i>He floated the cork.</i>   | <i>The cork floated.</i>    |
| <i>He filled the tub.</i>     | <i>The tub filled.</i>      |
| <i>He opened the door.</i>    | <i>The door opened.</i>     |
| <i>He matched his socks.</i>  | <i>His socks matched.</i>   |
| <i>He panicked the crowd.</i> | <i>The crowd panicked.</i>  |
| <i>He squirted the hose.</i>  | <i>The hose squirted.</i>   |

Not all verbs, however, permit sentences to be so paired. We have already seen that *They watched the show* is not related to *\*The show watched* in the way the paired sentences above are related to each other. Other verbs like *watch* can be seen in the following sentences:

|                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>He said the prayer.</i>         | but not <i>*The prayer said.</i> |
| <i>He printed his name.</i>        | <i>*His name printed.</i>        |
| <i>He approved their decision.</i> | <i>*Their decision approved.</i> |
| <i>He promoted the student.</i>    | <i>*The student promoted.</i>    |
| <i>He spanked the child.</i>       | <i>*The child spanked.</i>       |

Although all the sentences on the left in both groups look very much alike, we can see that the two groups are really different because their sentences relate to others in diverse ways.

In considering the structure of clauses, it is thus necessary to pay attention to several things. First we must ask whether the clause has complements and if so, how many:

- 1 COMPLEMENT: The millionaire endowed *a canary hospital*.
- 2 COMPLEMENTS: He asked *the computer* / *a question*.
- 0 COMPLEMENTS: Somebody giggled.



Then if there are complements, we must ask what kind they can be, whether noun phrases, pronouns, adjectives, or embedded clauses of various sorts:

|                      |                                                       |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| NOUN OR PRONOUN:     | He whitewashed <i>the fence</i> (or <i>it</i> ).      |
| NOUN ONLY:           | The fat man weighed <i>four hundred pounds</i> .      |
| NOUN OR ADJECTIVE:   | The fireman became <i>a hero</i> (or <i>heroic</i> ). |
| ADJECTIVE ONLY:      | The milk tasted <i>sour</i> .                         |
| <i>that</i> -CLAUSE: | Noah believed <i>that the rain would stop</i> .       |
| INFINITIVE:          | The acrobat expected <i>to fall</i> .                 |
| GERUND:              | The newspaper has stopped <i>printing scandals</i> .  |

Further we must determine whether the verb of the clause is **active** or **passive**, and if active, whether or not it has a corresponding passive:

|                         |                                           |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| ACTIVE:                 | The dog <i>caught</i> some fleas.         |
| PASSIVE:                | Some fleas <i>were caught</i> by the dog. |
| ACTIVE WITH NO PASSIVE: | The dog <i>had</i> some fleas.            |

Next we must observe whether the complement can be deleted or not:

|               |                                         |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------|
| DELETABLE:    | A movie followed <i>the late news</i> . |
| DELETED:      | A movie followed.                       |
| NONDELETABLE: | They ran <i>an old movie</i> .          |

Last we need to see whether the clause expresses a **causative** meaning or not; we know that it does if we can make a paraphrase with the verb **cause** or use the complement to replace the subject:

|                      |                               |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| CAUSATIVE:           | He burned the leaves.         |
| PARAPHRASE:          | He caused the leaves to burn. |
| SUBJECT-REPLACEMENT: | The leaves burned.            |
| NONCAUSATIVE:        | The girls watched the show.   |

There are still other things about complements that might be examined, but enough has been said to show that a simple division of clauses into transitive (with a complement) and intransitive (without a complement) is far from a full accounting for clause structure. In addition to variations in the complements, however, there are other differences between clauses. For instance, a clause can be either **declarative** in form or **interrogative**:<sup>6</sup>

| DECLARATIVE                | INTERROGATIVE              |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| She is cooking chow mein.  | Is she cooking chow mein?  |
| The South will rise again. | Will the South rise again? |
| He has been playing poker. | Has he been playing poker? |

<sup>6</sup>Although the declarative form is generally used for making statements, and the interrogative for asking questions, there are exceptions. It has already been pointed out that with appropriate intonation a declarative clause can be a question: *She is cooking chow mein?*

In each case the first word in the verbal phrase is inverted with the subject to make the corresponding interrogative sentence. But suppose there is only a one-word verb in the clause, as in *They like ROTC*. In that case instead of simply inverting subject and verb (*\*Like they ROTC?*), in Modern English we add the empty morpheme *do* and invert it: *Do they like ROTC?*

The interrogative sentences above are of a kind called *yes-no questions* because an appropriate answer to them is simply "yes" or "no." Another kind of interrogative sentence is the *wh question*, so called because typically it begins with a *wh* word (*who, which, what, when, where, why*) that questions some particular part of the clause. *Yes-no* questions are about the clause as a whole; *Is she cooking chow mein?* is not a query about her or the chow mein in particular, but rather about the whole situation, meaning 'Is it the case that she is cooking chow mein?' *Wh* questions are about one element in the clause only. Consider the declarative sentence *The alumni burned the goalpost on the field last Saturday*. We can pick out five parts of this clause, each of which can be separately questioned:

- (1) SUBJECT: *Who* burned the goalpost on the field last Saturday? The alumni.
- (2) PREDICATE: *What* did the alumni *do* on the field last Saturday? Burned the goalpost.
- (3) COMPLEMENT: *What* did the alumni burn on the field last Saturday? The goalpost.
- (4) ADJUNCT OF PLACE: *Where* did the alumni burn the goalpost last Saturday? On the field.
- (5) ADJUNCT OF TIME: *When* did the alumni burn the goalpost on the field? Last Saturday.

For *wh* questions, "yes" and "no" will not do as answers; they require that the appropriate clause part be identified.

In addition to declaratives and interrogatives, there are also *imperatives* for making requests (*Cook chow mein.*) and *exclamations* for exclaiming (*How she does cook chow mein!*). There are, then, a great many different structures for clauses, of whose variety only a limited portion has been suggested on these pages. The structure of phrases and of words has not been considered at all, although great diversity is to be found among them as well. We have looked briefly at the relationship of subject and complements to the clause and at such structural variations as are involved in the contrast between declaratives and interrogatives. There are still other differences in clause structure, such as those illustrated by *Beowulf slew Grendel*, *It was Beowulf that slew Grendel*, *Grendel was who Beowulf slew*, and *What Beowulf did was slay Grendel* or by *He gave her a diamond*, *A diamond he gave her*, *Her he gave a diamond*, and *Gave her a diamond, he did*. The number of different changes that can be made in the structure of a clause is very large indeed.

In structures, as in word classes, how many we recognize depends on how detailed we want our grammar to be.

### Exercises

- 23.** The following clauses all have the same superficial structure: noun phrase + verb + noun phrase. A more detailed study, however, would recognize at least five different structures like those described earlier. Identify each clause with a number (1) through (5) according to which of the sentences on p. 169 it is most like.
1. The dogs followed their trainer.
  2. The stage manager dimmed the lights.
  3. Albert dried the dishes.
  4. That skirt length becomes a young girl.
  5. The play lasted three hours.
  6. The steak weighed two pounds.
  7. A little boy exploded the balloon.
  8. Anybody can ask questions.
  9. The immigrant improved his English.
  10. Zuleika had the answer.
- 24.** Which of the following clauses have corresponding passives?
1. Herman resembles Mr. Roberts.
  2. Herman imitates Mr. Roberts.
  3. That hair style becomes her.
  4. The hairdresser flatters her.
  5. The movie lasted three hours.
- 25.** Which of the following have deletable complements?
1. The nurse calmed the child.
  2. The candidate thanked his supporters.
  3. You have omitted the last letter.
  4. The hostess poured the tea.
  5. The patient read a magazine.
- 26.** Which of the following are causatives?
1. The chairman called a meeting.
  2. The chairman ended the meeting.
  3. The farmer was growing alfalfa.
  4. The farmer was harvesting alfalfa.
  5. A stoplight can move the traffic faster.

27. What is the *yes-no* question that corresponds to each of the following statements?
1. Anyone can be a French chef.
  2. Phoebe has been trying to catch the brass ring.
  3. Class rings are not being worn this year.
  4. The King of Transylvania keeps vampire bats.
  5. Frodo used to eat five meals a day.
28. Make a *wh* question that queries each italicized item.
1. That policeman would arrest *his own mother* for speeding.
  2. *That* policeman would arrest his own mother for speeding.
  3. That policeman would *arrest his own mother for speeding*.
  4. That policeman would arrest his own mother *for speeding*.
  5. That policeman would arrest *his own* mother for speeding.

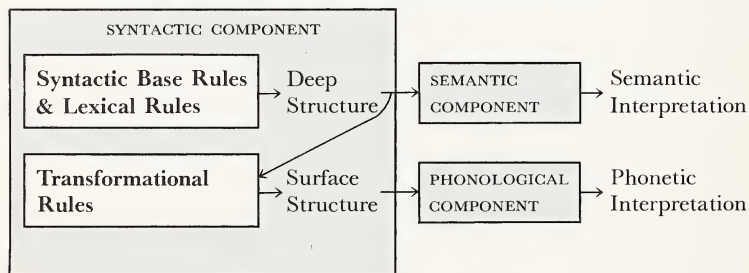
## A THEORY OF LANGUAGE

A theory is a way of looking at and of explaining things. Indeed, the word comes from a Greek verb meaning 'look at, view.' Theories are thus like windows through which we view reality; and the view we get will be determined in part by the location, shape, size, and transparency of the theoretical window.<sup>7</sup> In the early study of physics, atoms were thought of as like billiard balls with hooks protruding from them. When two atoms bumped against each other their hooks might get entangled, and thus matter as we know it would be built up from extremely small particles. Later the atom was likened to a miniature solar system with a relatively heavy, powerful solar nucleus surrounded by planetlike electrons. The billiard-ball model and the solar-system model are quite different ways of looking at atoms, reflecting different degrees of knowledge about the constitution of matter and emphasizing different characteristics of the atom. So also, when physicists want to describe light, they use either of two theoretical models. In some ways light resembles a stream of small particles; in other ways it is like a wave motion. Consequently it is possible to talk about light as either a particle or a wave, depending on which analogy is more useful at the time. A theory is "right" only to the extent that it satisfactorily explains the thing it is about, and what counts as a satisfactory explanation varies with the circumstances. When we want to describe what a language is like and explain how it works, we also need a theory, of which linguists have invented several. The fact that there are different theories about language means simply that we have different windows for viewing it.

<sup>7</sup>The analogy is borrowed from Kenneth Pike.

One linguistic theory that is widely used today is known as generative-transformational grammar. Earlier in this chapter it was suggested that grammatical descriptions can be either highly detailed or more general and that the amount of detail needed depends partly on what the description is used for. A description that aims at being as detailed and precise as possible, so that it tries to record every distinction made by the language, is called a generative grammar. The term *generate*, as it is used in grammar, does not mean to create or produce; rather, it means to define explicitly and describe all the grammatical sentences of a language, thereby distinguishing them from ungrammatical ones. A **generative grammar** tries to state clearly and completely what a person has to know in order to use a language. A **transformational grammar** relates deep and surface structures by means of transformational rules that change one into the other. Thus, generative-transformational grammar aims at accounting for all the grammatical sentences of English, and in doing so, it transforms the deeper meaningful structure of the sentence into its surface, pronounceable form. The generative-transformational model of language consists of three main components that can be pictured as in the accompanying figure.

### THE GENERATIVE-TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL



The generation of a sentence begins in the **syntactic component** with the **syntactic base rules** and the **lexical rules**. Together they define the deep structure of a sentence, that aspect of sentence structure relating most directly to meaning. A sample base rule is

$$(1) \quad S \rightarrow NP + VP$$

a rule that can be interpreted as 'A sentence consists of a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase.' The rules make use of category symbols like **S** for 'sentence,' **NP** for 'noun phrase,' and **VP** for 'verb phrase,' as well as operators, like the arrow, for 'consists of' or 'is to be rewritten as' and the plus mark for 'followed by.'

Another kind of rule that might be found in the syntactic base is

$$(2) \quad VP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} V-t + NP \\ V-i \end{array} \right\}$$

in which the braces indicate that either the first or the second line must be chosen, so that the rule might be read as 'A verb phrase consists of either a transitive verb and a noun phrase or an intransitive verb.'

A third kind of rule is

$$(3) \quad NP \rightarrow D + N (S)$$

in which the parentheses mean that the enclosed item is optional, so the rule can be interpreted as 'A noun phrase consists of a determiner (a grammatical class that includes the articles) followed by a noun and optionally a sentence.'

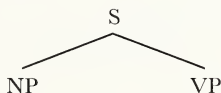
The three base rules above are not adequate by themselves to generate the deep structures of English sentences, but they show what such rules might be like. If we add to them some lexical rules, like (4) through (7) below, we can see how the process of generating a sentence works.

- (4)  $D \rightarrow \text{the, a, this, that, some}$
- (5)  $N \rightarrow \text{man, woman, dog, goldfish, worm}$
- (6)  $V-t \rightarrow \text{saw, caught, chased, wanted}$
- (7)  $V-i \rightarrow \text{sneezed, swam, listened, talked}$

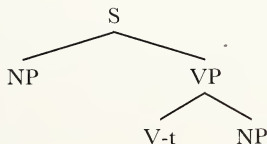
We can use the seven rules to draw tree diagrams for the deep structure of a number of English sentences, for example, *The man caught a goldfish*. Since it is a sentence we are generating, we begin with the symbol for sentence:

S

Then we apply rule (1) by writing NP and VP beneath the sentence symbol and connected to it by branches:

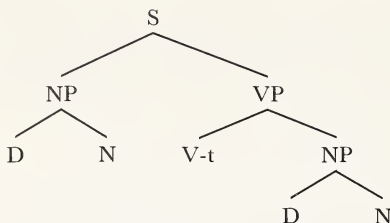


Next we apply rule (2) in the same way by choosing the  $V-t + NP$  line and putting those symbols beneath VP and connected to it:

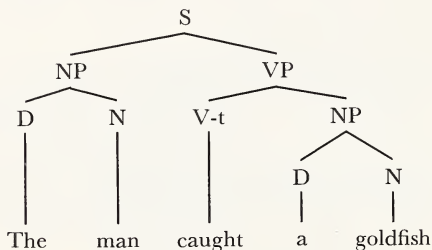




Now we apply rule (3) to both of the NP's in the developing tree, rejecting the S option both times:

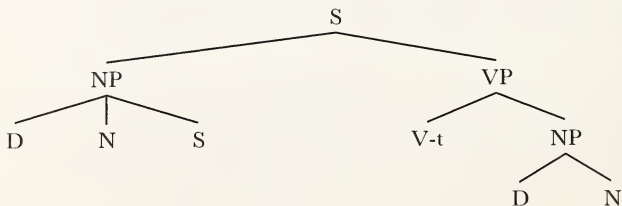


Finally we apply the lexical rules by choosing the appropriate D, N, and V-t for each of the unbranched nodes:

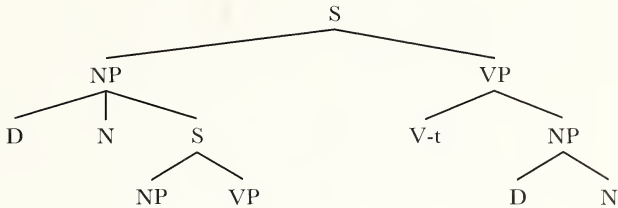


Thus, we have generated the sentence by defining all of its parts with their relationship to one another and have at the same time produced the tree diagram that describes the sentence.

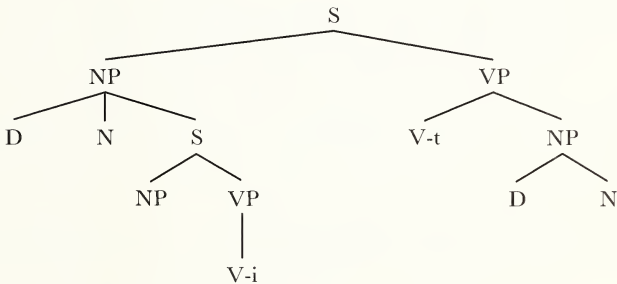
Suppose, however, that in applying rule (3) to expand the first NP, we had chosen the S option. Then the tree, before the lexical rules, would look like this:



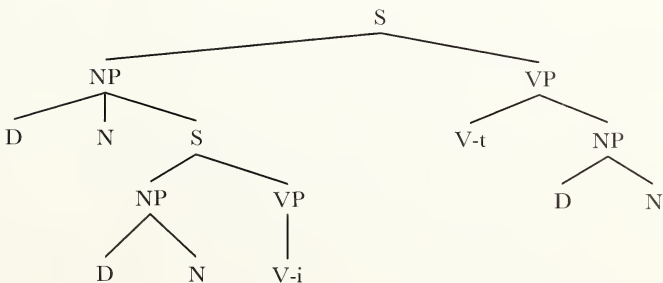
Now we must do something about the second S node before we can fill in all the lexical items. It is necessary to go back and apply rule (1) again to expand the new S:



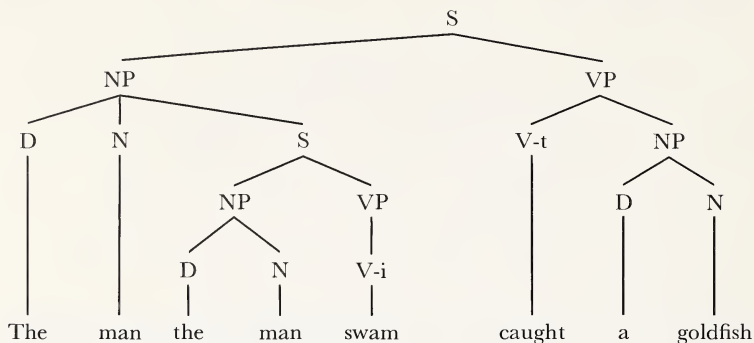
Next rule (2) must be reapplied, but this time let us say that we choose the second line between the braces, making VP simply V-i:



Now we are ready to apply rule (3) again:



Making appropriate lexical choices from rules (4) through (7), we can end with a tree like this:



This tree satisfactorily represents a deep structure but is not correct as a description of an actual English sentence. We want to generate a surface structure like *The man who (or that) swam caught a goldfish*. To do so we need the other set of rules that form part of the syntactic component of the grammar, namely the **transformational rules**. Among these rules there is one that says when we have a sequence of **D N D N** in which the **N**'s are identical, as in the tree above, the second **D N** is to be replaced by *who* or *that* if the **N** is a human noun, and by *which* or *that* if it is nonhuman. Transformational rules thus adjust deep structure so that it assumes the appropriate surface form for the pronunciation of the sentence.

Sentences like *Jack was killing giants* and *Giants were being killed by Jack* are very different in their surface structure subjects, verb forms, and complements; yet both sentences mean essentially the same thing, with Jack and the giants performing the same roles in the same event. Consequently the two sentences must have the same, or practically the same, deep structure, the differences between them being on the surface as the result of transformational rules that have modified the underlying form so as to make the sentences appear more different from one another than they are. An opposite example is *Jack is nice to entertain*, which can have either of two meanings: 'It is nice of Jack to entertain somebody' or 'It is nice to entertain Jack.' In this case two very different deep structures have been transformed into the same surface structure, thus creating an ambiguous sentence.

Once a deep structure has been generated, two things happen to it. On the one hand it is fed into the **semantic component**, where its words and grammatical structures are analyzed and interpreted semantically. On the other hand it is subject to various transformations that often disguise the deep structure, making similar sentences look different or different sentences

look alike, as we have already seen. The surface structure that results from the application of transformation rules is fed into the **phonological component**, where the pronunciation of the sentence is determined as a phonetic interpretation of surface structure.

The generative-transformational model of language pictures it as something much like a computer, with its various components performing different tasks according to the various rules, which are like the program written into the computer to determine its operation. This is not to say that those who use this theory of language are in fact concerned with computers or translating machines or other mechanical applications of language study, but merely that the theory suggests such an analogy. In fact, anyone who makes a theory about language must ultimately be concerned with how human beings learn and use language, an ability that more than any other single thing marks man's unique nature.

Although the generative-transformational grammar of Noam Chomsky is probably the best known and most widely used of modern language theories, it is not the only one. In addition there is the **stratificational theory** of Sydney Lamb, which holds that language has not just two levels of deep and surface structure but a series of levels or **strata**, each with a different kind of structure. A sentence is realized in a different way on each of the strata, as a string of sounds, as a tree of morphemes, as a constellation of meanings. The whole of a language is an immense **network** connecting human experience to sound waves in the air. When we talk we send impulses through this network from our experience to the muscles in our throat and mouth that produce sound waves; when we listen impulses travel in the opposite direction from sound waves as received by the ear to an interpretation of them in terms of our experience. Stratificational grammar is thus a model of the speaking and listening process and sees language not as a thing but as a system of relationships between content and expression.

The **tagmemic theory** of Kenneth Pike views language as just one special variety of human behavior that can be accounted for with the same general theory that might be used to explain other forms of behavior like football games, mealtimes, and church services. One of the important contributions of tagmemic theory is its observation that language, like all other forms of human behavior, must distinguish between the *emic* and the *etic*. **Etic differences** are those that can be observed but that are normally ignored by the speakers of a particular language, for example, the fact that the last sound of *up* may be pronounced either with or without a puff of air and the fact that the /l/ sound of *silly* may be either "clear" like that of *lea* or "dark" like that of *sill*. Etic differences are never used to signal a difference in meaning, whereas **emic differences**, such as that between the last sounds of *up* and *ugh*, are so used. Tagmemic theory is so called because it postulates a unit, the **tagmeme**, which is the basic unit of grammar, just as the phoneme

is of phonology and the morpheme is of vocabulary. A tagmeme is the correlation between a grammatical function like subject-of-active-verb and the class of words, for example nouns, that can fill that function.

The **systemic** or **category-and-scale grammar** of M. A. K. Halliday is especially concerned with the varieties of structure discussed in the preceding section of this chapter. To describe the grammar of a language it uses four categories and three scales. The categories are **unit**, for example morpheme, word, phrase, clause, and sentence; **structure**, for instance the subject-predicator-complement structure of some English clauses; **class**, such as the parts of speech; and **system**, for example the system of active and passive clauses or of causative and noncausative ones. The scales are **rank**, which is the position a unit holds in a hierarchy; **exponence**, which connects the linguistic data to the categories of the theory, so that we can say *man* is an exponent of the word unit or that *Man is mortal* is an exponent of the subject-predicator-complement structure; and **delicacy**, which is the amount of detail in which we look at language.

There are still other possible theories.<sup>8</sup> Having different ways of looking at the same facts is no disadvantage. On the contrary, it may help us to learn more about how language works, to see human speech from diverse but complementary points of view.

## Exercises

29. Use rules (1) through (7) to draw a deep structure tree for the following sentence: *The woman who sneezed caught the dog that chased the man who wanted a goldfish that talked.*
30. Using rules (1) through (7), generate the deep structure of a sentence that is different from any in this chapter, and write the sentence as it would be pronounced after the application of any relevant transformational rules.

<sup>8</sup>Although it is hardly possible to recommend any of them for the general reader, the most important statements of the linguistic theories mentioned above are Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague, 1957) and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965); Sydney Lamb, *Outline of Stratificational Grammar* (Washington, D.C., 1966); Kenneth Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (The Hague, 1967); M. A. K. Halliday, "Categories of the Theory of Grammar," *Word*, XVII (1961), 241-92, and "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English," *Journal of Linguistics*, III (1967), 37-81, 199-244, and IV (1968), 179-215.

# 6

## MEANING

Meaning is what language is all about. Although language is sounds we make with our mouth, it is more than that; for if it were not for the meaning they carry, sounds would be just noise. They would no more be language than is the tick of a clock, the hum of a bee, or the babbling of an infant. Thus, when we study meaning, we are looking into the very heart of language.

There are basically two ways meaning can be expressed: by morphemes and by grammatical structures. A morpheme, as we saw in Chapter 4, is a sign that expresses meaning by some combination of sounds, while a grammatical structure, like those we looked at in Chapter 5, is the hierarchical order in which morphemes are arranged. These two kinds of meaning are often called **lexical meaning** and **structural meaning**, respectively, but there is no absolute difference between the kinds of meaning expressed in one way or the other. Indeed, the same bit of information can sometimes be shown by structural order alone and at other times partly by morphemes. Thus, the information that fish are the ones that do the eating in ***Fish eat worms*** is shown by word order alone, but in ***Worms are eaten by fish***, the same information is shown at least partially through the word *by*, and in ***Fish are worm-eaters*** partly through the suffix *-er*. In the present chapter we will be concerned mainly with lexical meaning; however, since there is no hard and fast dividing line, most of what is said is also applicable to structural meaning.



## WHAT IS MEANING?

So far we have been talking about meaning as though it were a simple and clear matter. On the contrary, the meaning of the word *meaning* is one of the most difficult problems we can face. As soon as we ask the question, "What do we mean when we talk about meaning?" we are apt to feel vaguely uncomfortable and to begin tripping over our own words. Philosophers, logicians, and anthropologists, as well as linguists, have grappled with the issue, and of the various solutions they have proposed we will look at five. They are, to be sure, not the only ones—far from it—but they will illustrate the variety of ways men have proposed to answer the question "What is meaning?"

(1) **The meaning of a word is the thing it names.** *Thing* must, of course, be understood in a sense broad enough to encompass objects like 'pencil,' abstractions like 'order,' qualities like 'red,' actions like 'eat,' relations like 'above,' and states like 'remain,' besides a great many other things, whose "thingness" is not at all obvious. There are several problems with this view. One is that there are various words that have quite clear and distinct meanings but that do not name any existing thing, however broadly we may interpret the word *thing*. The word *unicorn* is an example. If we should wake up one morning to discover a unicorn munching roses in the garden, we would certainly recognize the beast with no difficulty. "There is," we should say, "a unicorn in the garden." We all know perfectly well what the word *unicorn* means, but since the unicorn is a mythical beast, there are no things for the word to name.

Another problem with this view of meaning, which has been called naive realism, is that two terms may mean different things and yet name the same thing. For example, *the president of the United States* and *the commander in chief of the American armed forces*. The fact that we can say "The president of the United States is the commander in chief of the American armed forces" shows that the two terms name the same person, and also that they have different meanings because the sentence is not obviously redundant. If the two terms meant the same thing, that sentence would be as redundant as "The president of the United States is the president of the United States." The terms, however, give different information, and thus are different in meaning.

(2) **The meaning of a word is an idea associated with it in the mind.** This view of meaning, usually called mentalism, solves most of the difficulties associated with its opposite, naive realism, by moving the unicorns out of the garden and into the mind. But unfortunately it creates new problems of its own. When we describe anything, we seek to explain the less familiar in terms of the more familiar. Thus, if you want to know what a sand dollar

is, you would rather be told that it is an animal with a thin, pancake-shaped, brittle shell and a starlike pattern of markings that lives on the bottom of the ocean, than be told it is the *Echinarachnius parma*. The latter description may be more exact, but it is less helpful to most people. The problem with defining the word *meaning* in terms of ideas is roughly analogous, although not so obvious. We talk about ideas all the time, but the nature of an idea proves even more difficult to grasp than the nature of a meaning. Indeed, definitions of *idea* are often circular. An idea may be defined as a concept, and a concept as a thought, and a thought as an idea. Since ideas are even fuzzier and more abstract than meanings, they are not of much help in explaining the latter. To say that a meaning is an idea is rather like saying that magnetism is an attractive power or that fire is a process of combustion; it may be true, but it is not particularly useful. In short, unicorns in the mind turn out to be even more elusive than unicorns in the garden.

**(3) The meaning of a word is our disposition to respond in a certain way to that word as a result of our past experiences.** This way of looking at meaning is, like the mentalist definition, a psychological view, but it is based on quite a different psychology. Instead of talking about thoughts or ideas in the mind, which can be known only by looking within ourselves, it talks about the way we behave, something that can be observed from outside and measured. It is called a behaviorist definition. The chief difficulty with it is that it is not much better in practice than the mentalist one. If we were to say that the meaning of a word *is* the way we behave when we hear it, then we would have a kind of meaning that could be observed and recorded. But in fact much of the time when we are using language—for example, in a classroom or at family meals—we don't "behave" at all, at least not in any way that would help us much with the meaning of words. We just sit and listen or talk. Any overt behavior is likely to be unrelated to the meaning of what we hear and say. Consequently, the definition has to be phrased not in terms of how we act, but in terms of how we are disposed to act. But dispositions are like ideas in being interior, private things, not very useful in explaining what meaning is.

**(4) The meaning of a word is the characteristic that is common to the set of things named by the word.** This way of looking at meaning sounds rather formidable but, like a good many other formidable-sounding things, is actually quite simple. It is an effort to salvage what was useful in the realistic view of meaning, without confusing meaning with things named. The notion of sets has been popularized by the New Mathematics and is now widespread. It is simple enough: a set is a number of things that are somehow alike. The likeness that the things share is the characteristic that defines the set. Thus, being an animal with four legs is a characteristic that defines a set of the very many things we call quadrupeds, which is as much as to say that the

word *quadruped* means ‘an animal with four legs.’ Similarly, being a fabulous, horselike animal with one horn is a characteristic that defines a set of things we call unicorns. The fact that there are no unicorns is immaterial. A set can exist without any members and is then called empty. ‘All the whole numbers between 2 and 3’ defines such an empty set; the meaning of *unicorn* defines another.

To put the matter quite simply, all things we experience or imagine can be sorted out into sets. Whatever characteristic must be true of a thing for it to belong to a particular set is the meaning of the word that names the set. This view of meaning has a long history behind it and is still a useful one for many words. But it is awkward or quite inadequate for others; for example, it is hard to know what things are named by the unitalicized words in the following sentences or what characteristics pertain to them: *It’s time to go. There is a fly in here. Do you like borscht?*

(5) The meaning of a word is its relation to other features of the verbal and situational context in which it occurs. We can best examine this view of meaning by considering some examples. Suppose while reading you come across this sentence: “She carried a piggin in her left hand.”<sup>1</sup> Further suppose that you have never before in your life encountered the word *piggin*. Do you rush to a dictionary to find out what it means? Probably not. You are more likely to read the sentence twice, give a mental shrug, and go on reading. You know a piggin is a thing a woman can carry in one hand, and that seems to be all you need to know about it for the time being. Then on the same page you find this sentence: “Farther on she could stoop in one place and cover the bottom of her piggin with a deep layer of the purple berries.” Apparently piggins have bottoms and have something to do with berries. When you read “She had found a knee-high forest of bushes and had picked her piggin half full,” you can be sure that a piggin is a container of some sort, which might be used in gathering berries. Then a few pages later you find this: “Cean would need candles. She would mold them, and set them in a piggin of cold water, and loose them from the molds, and set them away in the chest.” You now know that piggins have other uses than berry picking and that they can hold water, so they are not baskets. It looks as though a piggin is some sort of bucket. You may not know everything about piggins, but you have a fairly accurate notion of what one is, and you got that notion from the sentences in which you encountered *piggin*, by observing its relation to the words around it. Thus, we might say that the meaning of a word is its relation to other words in the verbal context.

We also, of course, learn meaning by observing the relation of words to things in the nonlinguistic context—the situations in which language is used—

<sup>1</sup>Caroline Miller, *Lamb in His Bosom* (New York, 1933), p. 22.

as a child learns the meaning of *dog* by hearing the word while he sees the creature, or as we learn about a new space vehicle by seeing it on television.

A word thus has a twofold context: it has a place it occupies relative to other words (**verbal context**) and it has a use relative to the world of things and people (**situational context**). The meaning of the word can be said to be its relation to both of these contexts. This way of looking at meaning has the virtue of being close to the way we have actually learned most of the words we know.

The importance of the situational context to the meaning of a word becomes especially clear when we try to translate from one language to another, particularly if the word we are translating relates intimately to the culture and the two cultures are sharply different. For example, having borrowed the word *taboo* from a Polynesian language, we often use it more or less in the sense 'forbidden.' But if we wanted to give an accurate account of what the word means in the South Pacific, we would have to describe a great many things about how Polynesians live, and even then the emotional tone of the word might prove elusive. *Drugstore* would doubtless be equally difficult to translate into Tongan, or for that matter even into French. An American-style drugstore—in which drugs are the least important commodity sold, and indeed may not be sold at all—was opened in Paris and called quite sensibly *Le Drugstore*. When a language cannot translate, it usually borrows. Even between such closely related societies as those of America and France, translation may be difficult. So also the English word *quaint* is difficult to put into other languages; for that matter it is hard to paraphrase in English because there are no other expressions that quite match it.

Similar complications are presented by German *Weltschmerz* (literally 'world-pain,' a profound sadness and apathy produced by the disillusioning discovery that the real world does not live up to one's expectations, but mixed with a heavy sentimentality and romantic melancholy), Chinook *patshatl*, borrowed by English as *potlatch* (literally 'giving, gift,' a ceremony in which expensive presents are made to the guests or destroyed by burning, with the object of demonstrating the affluence of the party-giver and shaming the honoree, social status being determined by the lavishness of the potlatch), and French *tutoyer* (literally 'to say *tu*,' to address someone with the intimate pronoun *tu* and hence to be on familiar terms with the person addressed or to be overly familiar, to be insulting, depending on the situation). It is obviously possible to explain the meaning of such words, but it may be hard to make a translation that avoids sounding like an explanation. In every case, the meaning of these terms is intimately bound up with the whole cultural situation in which they are used. The fact that we encounter difficulties in moving from the meanings of one language to those of another suggests that there may be a complex relationship between the way we talk, the way we think, and the way the world is. We will next take a look at that relationship.

## Exercises

1. The verb *means* has a number of different uses in ordinary language. Explain how it is used in each of the following sentences by using other words for it. Consider paraphrases like *translates as*, *intends it to be understood*, *is a symptom*, *has as a consequence*, *names*, and *can substitute for*.
  1. *Interrogation point* means ‘question mark.’
  2. The rain means the end of our picnic.
  3. The Spanish word *mujer* means ‘woman’ in English.
  4. Thunder means it is going to rain.
  5. *Water* means the stuff that comes out of a spigot.
  6. When she says “It’s late,” she means she wants to leave.
  
2. Tell what the italicized words seem to mean, judging only from the contexts given here.
  1. But so far only trivial accusations have been made; now we come to the *gravamen* of the charge.
  2. The psalmist gives the days of our age as threescore and ten, which is a mere fourteen *lustrums*.
  3. Around the table of old wines gathered a group of eager *oenophiles* to study, swirl, inhale, and taste the vintages.
  4. Like a midwife, the shepherd knew the day and hour any of his lambs had been *yeaned*.
  5. Instead of tanning the hides, the leather-worker *tawed* them with alum and salt.
  
3. What difficulty would you have in explaining the meaning of the following to an Eskimo or an Australian aborigine who had no familiarity with Western culture?
  1. touchdown    2. mod    3. candidate    4. gearshift    5. soap opera

## WORDS AND THINGS

We have just seen that a particular language, because of the distinctive culture of its speakers, will provide ways of talking about things that another language has no ready way to deal with. But even more significant is the fact that two languages will slice up in different ways the experience that is common to all men. An example that is often cited because it is a particularly clear and simple one is the color spectrum. Colors blend imperceptibly



into one another along several dimensions including their hue (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple), their brightness (from light tints approaching white to dark shades approaching black), and their saturation (from pure, vivid colors to muted, faded ones).

It has been estimated that the human eye is capable of discriminating over a million different colors; obviously no language can name all of them. Instead, each language assigns names to certain colors and leaves the rest unlabeled. In English we have eleven common terms: pink, red, orange, brown, yellow, green, blue, purple, white, gray, and black.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure there are other English color words that we sometimes use. For example, there are aqua, auburn, beige, cerise, chartreuse, citrine, cream, crimson, drab, ecru, flesh, fuchsia, gold, hazel, indigo, ivory, lavender, lemon, lilac, magenta, maroon, mauve, navy, ochre, orchid, peach, rose, salmon, scarlet, sepia, sienna, silver, slate, tan, ultramarine, umber, vermilion, and violet—to name only a few of the hundreds available. But they are fancy or uncertain words. English speakers as a whole will not volunteer them if they are asked to say color words, and it is hard to get people to agree on exactly how to use them. They are not plain, honest colors like the familiar eleven.

But other languages divide the color continuum differently. For an English speaker lemons are yellow and oranges are orange, whereas the dark, dull color of cherries and the brighter color of tomatoes are merely different shades of red. We feel that these distinctions are completely natural, but there is nothing natural about them. They are rather a consequence of the purely conventional way our language analyzes color. Zuñi, a southwestern American Indian language, happens to do it differently. It has a single word for our *yellow* and *orange*. Consequently, for the Zuñi speaker the lemon and the orange are just shades of the same color, as are the cherry and tomato for us. Other languages divide the colors in still different ways. In Navaho, for example, there is one term that covers the area named by English *green*, *blue*, and *purple*. The world of color is the same for all men, but our languages relate to it in diverse ways.

Diversity in the way two languages relate to the same reality is by no means limited to colors. You might suppose that family relationship is something so natural that all languages would be much alike in the way they deal with it. In English we have thirteen basic kinship words (*father*, *mother*, *son*, *daughter*, *brother*, *sister*, *uncle*, *aunt*, *nephew*, *niece*, *cousin*, *husband*, *wife*) and some modifying terms (*great*, *grand*, *step*, *half*, *first*, *second*, *third*, *in-law*) used with one or another of the basic terms. Jinghpaw, a language of Southeast Asia, has eighteen basic terms, none of which correspond exactly to the

<sup>2</sup>The data to follow about English and Zuñi color terms has been adapted from Eric H. Lenneberg and John M. Roberts, *The Language of Experience*, *IJAL*, Memoir 13 (1956).



English words.<sup>3</sup> Thus Jinghpaw *nu* is used for one's mother, but also for any female relative who is of the mother's family and age group, for instance maternal aunts. Similarly, *wa* refers to one's father or a paternal uncle. *Hpu* is an older brother or an older son of one's father's brother; *na* is an older sister or an older daughter of one's father's brother; *nau* is a younger brother, sister, or child of the father's brother; *nam* is a younger daughter of one's mother's brother; *rat* is an older daughter of one's mother's brother; *hkau* is a son of one's father's sister or of one's mother's brother; and so forth.

English kinship terms divide family relationships mainly on the basis of the parent-child relation, the sibling relation, and sex. Jinghpaw, on the other hand, is concerned with family unit, age group, marriageability, and sex. Jinghpaw regards simple biological facts as of less importance than the social order—what persons live together, have mutual obligations, and can intermarry. Judged by the way we analyze relationships, the Jinghpaw terms seem hopelessly complex and confused, but in the light of their family structure, the Jinghpaw terminology is simple and straightforward, although to make the simplicity apparent we would have to examine their social order in detail.

Even a simple action like 'going' can be analyzed in strikingly different ways. Russian has no easy way of expressing just the meaning of English *he went*, which specifies only that the action of going occurred in the past. The Russian speaker must also tell whether the goer was walking or riding, whether the going was a general action or a specific one with a clear destination, and in the latter case, whether it is thought of as in progress or completed. Thus the Russian might choose to say any one of six things:

|                    |                                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>on khodil</i>   | 'he used to walk'               |
| <i>on shol</i>     | 'he was walking somewhere once' |
| <i>on poshol</i>   | 'he has walked somewhere'       |
| <i>on yezdil</i>   | 'he used to ride'               |
| <i>on yekhal</i>   | 'he was riding somewhere once'  |
| <i>on poyekhal</i> | 'he has ridden somewhere'       |

It is practically impossible for the Russian to be as vague and unspecific as the English speaker who says "He went." Yet we must not suppose that English is inherently vague or Russian finicky about details. Russian has only a single word *noga* that corresponds to the two English terms *leg* and *foot*. The Russian ankle, unlike the English, is not a major boundary in the human anatomy.

The English word *eat* names an activity that is analyzed as two distinct actions in German, which has the terms *essen* 'to eat like a human being'

<sup>3</sup>E. R. Leach, "Jinghpaw Kinship Terminology," *Rethinking Anthropology* (London, 1966).

and *fressen* 'to eat like an animal.' English *They are eating* might refer to either a group of people or a group of dogs; no such uncertainty is possible in German, for *Sie essen* would always refer to people, and *Sie fressen* to beasts. This nice distinction in German is matched by a different one in English. We say that a *cow* or *pig* on the farm has *flesh*, but the *meat* on our table is *beef* or *pork*. In German the living *Rind* or *Schwein* on the farm has *Fleisch*, and the *Fleisch* on our table is *Rindfleisch* or *Schweinefleisch*. To speak of eating cow-flesh or pig-flesh seems indelicate at best to us English speakers, but our distinction between living creatures and prepared, edible ones is not very common among the world's languages and is not made even in English when it comes to chickens and lambs. In turn the German is likely to think that our failure to distinguish between the strikingly different activities of a human's eating and an animal's eating betokens a certain lack of sensibility. In fact neither English nor German is particularly crude; they have simply categorized things in different ways.

All human languages are similar in some ways—this is to be expected, since their speakers are all human and all inhabit roughly the same world. But English, Zuñi, Jinghpaw, Russian, and German—in fact, all languages—are also different from one another in many ways. This is also to be expected because our common world presents an infinity of different things to be talked about, and we have no reason to expect that all men should talk about exactly the same things. When we look about us at all the diverse languages spoken on this planet, we come face to face with two great wonders. The first is that languages differ so greatly. The second is that languages are so much alike. Which is the greater wonder no man can say.

## Exercises

4. Fancy color words like the following are often used in advertising. Identify these colors, using only the eleven common terms and modifiers like *dark*, *light*, *intense*, and *faded*.
 

|            |             |          |          |               |
|------------|-------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 1. apricot | 3. burgundy | 5. maize | 7. olive | 9. plum       |
| 2. bronze  | 4. coral    | 6. mint  | 8. puce  | 10. turquoise |
5. Judging from the following words, how does Latin kinship terminology differ from that of English?
 

|                                 |                                |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. avunculus 'mother's brother' | 4. patruus 'father's brother'  |
| 2. matertera 'mother's sister'  | 5. amita 'father's sister'     |
| 3. sobrinus 'maternal cousin'   | 6. patruelis 'paternal cousin' |

6. Some other English words also make the nonfood–food distinction of *flesh–meat*, *cow–beef*, *pig–pork*. Which of the following have corresponding meat terms?

1. calf            2. deer            3. duck            4. rabbit            5. sheep

## TALKING AND THINKING

The fact that languages differ from one another in the way they relate to the world about us suggests an intriguing question: Do all men think in the same patterns, regardless of their native language, or do those who speak different languages think in different ways? Clearly this question involves another: Does the way we think depend on the way we talk? With regard to these questions there are two extreme positions that can be described by different metaphors.

First, we might say that language is like a suit of clothes that covers the body of thought. This metaphor implies that language and thought are relatively independent—just as the same body can be dressed in different clothes, so the same thought can be expressed in different languages or different words. Indeed, in this view language is no more than a superficial adornment. A naked thought, like a naked body, can be so draped with words that we must infer it from the surface form of the language, yet it is still the thought that gives shape to the language.

Second, we may say that language is like a mold that gives shape to whatever plastic thought is poured into it. The implications here are that thought is dependent on language for the form it assumes, that the “same” thought, expressed in different words, is not the same at all. Before it has been formed into a distinctive shape by the mold of language, thought is amorphous—indeed, hardly worthy of the name. Whatever deserves to be called thought is simply unspoken language.

Each of these positions has something to be said for it. The feeling that all of us have from time to time that we know just what we mean but cannot find the right words for it suggests that language is merely a clothing for thought. On the other hand, there is the common experience of talking to oneself, which may be practically without visible sign or may involve a good deal of silent lip movement and facial contortion. The fact that everybody talks to himself—and many find it distinctly easier to solve problems when they do so—suggests that thinking is a matter of language. E. M. Forster tells of an old lady whose complaint “How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?” shows that for her thought and language are identical.

The garment view of language and thought usually assumes that all men

think alike, the differences between their languages being trivial variations that can easily be discounted. Once we have put aside the variations that exist among particular tongues we have left what is universal to all languages—namely, human thought, logic, and reason. This view of language was particularly common during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it led to the writing of numerous “philosophical and universal” grammars that strove to penetrate the surface of language and plumb the depths where language gives way to the underlying thought processes. In recent years it has again become popular, although in a considerably more sophisticated form.

The mold view assumes that men who speak different languages will think or even perceive the world differently. This opinion was clearly implied by Francis Bacon early in the seventeenth century when he wrote about four “idols” or delusions that lead men astray in their reasoning. One of these is the Idol of the Market, by which Bacon meant language (the Market being the forum or public square where men gather to converse and debate). Bacon held that the language in which we think is often an obstruction because words can “force the understanding, throw everything into confusion, and lead mankind into vain and innumerable controversies and fallacies.” Bacon stated the general position quite clearly when he wrote, “men imagine that their reason governs words, while, in fact, words react upon the understanding.”<sup>4</sup>

In our own century, the American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf raised the question again by proposing that the language we speak determines at least partially how we react to the world around us.<sup>5</sup> As an example he compared European languages like English with the American Indian tongue Hopi. Whorf found a number of significant differences, among them the fact that English tends to objectify time—to treat it as a thing. We talk of “saving time,” as though it were grain to be gathered into a barn for safekeeping, or of “measuring time,” as though it were a rock whose dimensions could be taken with a tape. Words denoting cyclic events, *summer*, *September*, *morning*, are nouns—that is, thing words. In Hopi, according to Whorf, all is different. Time is treated as a subjective experience of “becoming later.” It is a process, not a thing, and cyclic time words belong to a special part of speech—more like our adverbs than our nouns.

In European languages generally there are two kinds of nouns (already cited on page 166): **mass nouns**, like *milk*, *air*, *meat*, *mush*, and *wheat*, which name a kind of substance without any characteristic shape or form, and **unit nouns**, like *bottle*, *cloud*, *piece*, *bowl*, and *kernel*, which name individual objects

<sup>4</sup> *Novum Organum*, 59–60.

<sup>5</sup> *Language, Thought, and Reality* (Cambridge, 1956).

with a definite form or outline. The distinction between these two sorts of words parallels a distinction that has been characteristic of European philosophy since the time of Plato and Aristotle—namely, that of *matter* and *form*. Hopi lacks the distinction, all of its nouns being like our individual nouns with an implied shape. Whorf suggests that this major idea in European philosophy, that we can analyze things into matter and form, may be due to a trick our language has played on us.

As a final instance we can note the grammatical requirement that puts a subject and a verb into practically every sentence we use and that consequently disposes us to think that every action must have an actor as subject of the appropriate verb. Thus, if we see a bright flash of light, we say “Something flashed” or “It lightnined.” We manufacture the subject *something* or *it*, even though the doer of the action is unknown or quite nonexistent. The Hopi response to the same phenomenon would be *rehpi* ‘flashing,’ with no need for a grammatical subject and hence no need to postulate a flasher who flashed the flash.

Whorf thought he could discern in such grammatical differences between the English and Hopi languages a motive that led their speakers to view the world in much different ways and to react to it with equal diversity. He suggested that the American or European “way of life” is a product of the way we talk. The Whorf hypothesis, as this idea is often called, has been much discussed, and some efforts have been made to test whether people speaking languages with markedly different systems will react to the world in different ways. The tests have been inconclusive, partly because of the extreme difficulty in devising experiments. So difficult is that task that many linguists today have decided the question is not a scientific one at all, but rather a metaphysical proposition.

Nonetheless, if Whorf is right, his theory has far-reaching implications. Among other things, it suggests that the thoughts of men might be controlled through control over their language. More than one fiction-writer has taken advantage of that implication of the theory to spin out his story. For example, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* envisions a world in which the government is promoting a new form of English called Newspeak, so constructed that no one who uses it can have any “ungoodthinkful” (heretical) notions at all. The language simply has no way of expressing ideas the government would find objectionable.

The kind of language-engineering that would control man’s thought and world view by manipulating his speech has no existence outside fiction. It is certainly true that language is a very important element in our thinking processes, but it is not the only element. Moreover, beneath all the variety among the world’s languages, there is a striking agreement. On the whole, languages are more alike than different, so whatever influence they may have

on thought will be more or less the same. We can thus conclude that both extreme views of the connection between language and thought are wrong, though each has some truth in it. Language may guide, but it does not inescapably control our thinking. Words, thoughts, and things fit together fairly well, but they are not the same.

## Exercises

7. What view of the relation between language and thought is assumed in each of these quotations?

1. Our need to use external signs to make ourselves understood makes us bind our ideas so closely to words that often we attend more to the words than to the ideas expressed. Such misplaced attention is one of the most common sources of confusion in our thought and speech.

Antoine Arnauld, *The Art of Thinking* (1662)

2. He gave man speech, and speech created thought,  
Which is the measure of the universe.

. . .

3. Language is a perpetual Orphic song,  
Which rules with Dædal harmony a throng  
Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

P. B. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820)

8. Newspeak, the language of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, includes the following words. What principles seem to underlie their composition?

1. bellyfeel 'unthinking, enthusiastic acceptance of things'
2. duckSpeak 'automatic utterance of orthodox views'
3. joycamp 'forced labor camp'
4. Minitrue 'Ministry of Truth, that is, of Propaganda'
5. Minipax 'Ministry of Peace, that is, of War'
6. Miniluv 'Ministry of Love, that is, Secret Police'
7. goodsex 'chastity'
8. goodthink 'uncritical, automatic responses'
9. doublethink 'the ability to believe contradictions'
10. Big Brother 'dictator'



## DIMENSIONS OF MEANING

Meaning is the relation between a bit of language and the whole context in which it occurs. This context, however, is unlimited; it includes other bits of language, the persons who are talking, the place, time, and circumstances of the talking, as well as the things talked about. Consequently, to make the study of meaning practical we must focus on certain relationships that can be thought of as dimensions of meaning.

The first dimension we can call simply the **sense** of the word. It is the relation between language and things in the nonlinguistic world. This dimension, which is often called **reference**, is what we usually have in mind when we talk about meaning. For example, the primary sense of *cookie* is 'a small, flat, dry, sweet cake,' as a dictionary might define it.

The second dimension is the **association** the word has with other words in the various lexical contexts in which it occurs. For *cookie* the associations are derived from phrases like these:

*some \_\_\_\_\_ s for dessert*  
*\_\_\_\_\_ s and coffee*  
*get some \_\_\_\_\_ s at the bakery*  
*a Chinese fortune \_\_\_\_\_*  
*that's the way the \_\_\_\_\_ crumbles*  
*be a smart \_\_\_\_\_*

The third dimension is the **grammatical function** of the word, its part of speech, the way it relates to structure. The function of *cookie* is its identity as a noun, and more precisely a noun that is common, countable, and inanimate.

The fourth dimension includes a number of different relations that we can lump together under the term **scope**. The scope of a word includes any special limitations on its use. For example, *cookie*, although familiar enough in the United States, is not commonly used in Standard British English, the corresponding term being *biscuit*, which thus has quite a different sense from its American one. Part of the scope of *cookie* is that it is American English.

Having identified four dimensions of meaning, let us examine them in somewhat greater detail. Some words have a sense that can be analyzed into parts. For example, compare the most common sense of each of the following related words:

*chair*: 'a seat, with a back, for one person'  
*stool*: 'a seat, without a back, without arms, for one person'  
*sofa*: 'a seat, with a back, with arms, upholstered, for more than one person'  
*bench*: 'a seat, not upholstered, for more than one person'

Each sense has been divided by commas into a number of **semantic features**. Thus all four words have in common that they refer to a seat. Each of the four words contrasts with the other three in some combination of the remaining features, 'with(out) a back,' 'with(out) arms,' '(not) upholstered,' 'for (more than) one person.' If a particular feature is not mentioned for some word, we can conclude that it is not distinctive—for instance, some chairs have arms, some do not; therefore the contrast is of no significance, and the feature 'with(out) arms' is not mentioned in the definition of *chair*. If, however, we wanted to specify the sense of *armchair*, the feature 'with arms' would become relevant and distinctive. Oddly enough, English seems to have no regular term for referring simply to chairs without arms. Although such articles of furniture are common enough, to specify them we have to use a grammatical phrase like the one in the preceding sentence.

As another example of semantic features, we can take the English kinship words referred to earlier in this chapter. If we omit *husband* and *wife*, which involve kinship by marriage rather than by blood, the rest of the basic terms can be listed as in the following table. The semantic features listed across the top consist of a two-way choice between **male** and **female** (which is, however, not relevant to the word *cousin*), followed by three genealogical features 'child,' 'sibling,' 'parent,' of which one feature, two adjacent features, or all three may be present in the sense of any kinship term. The system

**SEMANTIC FEATURES OF KINSHIP WORDS**

|          | male/female | child (of) | sibling (of) | parent |
|----------|-------------|------------|--------------|--------|
| son      | male        | child      |              |        |
| daughter | female      | child      |              |        |
| brother  | male        |            | sibling      |        |
| sister   | female      |            | sibling      |        |
| father   | male        |            |              | parent |
| mother   | female      |            |              | parent |
| nephew   | male        | child of   | sibling      |        |
| niece    | female      | child of   | sibling      |        |
| uncle    | male        |            | sibling of   | parent |
| aunt     | female      |            | sibling of   | parent |
| cousin   |             | child of   | sibling of   | parent |

has an elegant simplicity about it, in the scientific sense of the word *simplicity*, namely 'a thrifty use of essentials.' Eleven senses can be reduced to the four choices indicated by the columns of the table.

Not all senses can be resolved into semantic features. The most common sense of the word *red*, for example, is hardly capable of such analysis. To define a color word like *red* we might specify the part of the color continuum that it refers to, or we might mention some things that are red, but there is no way we can break the sense down into features. 'Red' is a semantically whole and unanalyzable feature itself.

Semantic features are to the meaning of a word what phonetic features like labial, dental, nasal, or voice are to its pronunciation. The chief difference between the two is that semantic features are far more numerous and consequently have not been studied by linguists in so much detail.

There is an important connection between sense and association. We might say that the associations of a given word are the senses of all the words that it is used with most regularly. Just as you can know something about a man from the company he keeps, so we know something about a word from the lexical company it keeps, or to use a technical term, from its *collocation*. Because of the typical linguistic environments in which *cookie* is found, the word belongs to a set of words that includes *dessert*, *coffee*, *bakery*, *Chinese fortune*, and *crumbles*, words that provide some of the associations of *cookie*.

Associations can be either public or private, although there is no very firm boundary between the two. Most English speakers if asked to give associations for the word *picnic* would probably supply items like *basket*, *lunch*, *cloth*, *ham*, *ants*, and *summer*. By and large those associations are public ones that would be shared widely. A particular individual, however, might have some quite unusual associations for the word as a consequence of his personal experiences. Psychologists make use of this fact in a word-association test. As long as the individual being tested responds with associations that are public, his response can be judged "normal," but when he responds with private associations, he reveals something of his unique identity.

Relatively private associations can result from the special use of language that takes place in a tightly knit group like the family or between friends, in secret societies, or indeed in any group with special interests not shared by the speakers of the language as a whole. Public associations come from the normal, everyday use of language that we all share, or from famous instances of its use. Objectively considered, some associations due to widely known quotations can be surprising. *Gilding* and *lily* would not seem to have much in common, but there is a strong association between the words.<sup>6</sup> A

<sup>6</sup>In this case the association has even led to a popular revision of the quotation, so that Shakespeare's "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily" has given way to "gilding the lily."

sizable number of people who have only the foggiest idea of what *bodkin* refers to nevertheless invariably associate it with *bare* because they know the word only from Hamlet's "he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin."

Associations can also be either emotional or unemotional. Those mentioned so far have been fairly unemotional ones, but emotional associations are both common and of great importance. Emotional associations may become so strong that they all but swamp the sense of a word. The result is what are sometimes called purr-words and growl-words, items that could be replaced with an animal sound of pleasure or anger without losing a great part of the original message. *Liberty*, *freedom*, *democracy*, *Communism*, *tyranny*, and *atheism* are such words. On both sides of the Iron Curtain (another emotionally laden expression) official spokesmen claim that their people have "freedom" while others are "oppressed." Words used like that have very little sense; they are all emotional association.

There is a scale of emotional value for associations, the opposite poles of which are positive (that is, highly favorable, good) and negative (highly unfavorable, bad). The middle of the scale is neutral, neither good nor bad, but simply indifferent.<sup>7</sup> Between the two poles of the scale there is a continuum that can be arbitrarily marked off into a relatively small number of discrete steps, seven being typical. Thus we can say that the good-bad scale consists of the following degrees:

|              |               |                  |         |                 |              |             |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|
| very<br>good | quite<br>good | slightly<br>good | neutral | slightly<br>bad | quite<br>bad | very<br>bad |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|

If we rate an item like *assistant* on the scale it will probably be "neutral" or "slightly good." The item *junior executive* will certainly be higher, perhaps "quite good." *Flunky*, on the other hand, will fall low on the scale, perhaps "quite bad." Those three words, which might be used to refer to the same job, have strikingly different associations. A business firm that wants happy employees in the lower reaches of its management will call them junior executives rather than merely assistants. Only stock boys and sales girls are likely to call them flunkies.

<sup>7</sup>There are many possible scales of this sort, which can be grouped according to factors that they share. The most important of these groupings are (1) the **evaluative factor** that we are discussing (good/bad, true/false, clean/dirty); (2) the **potency factor** (strong/weak, masculine/feminine, big/little); (3) the **activity factor** (active/passive, excitable/calm, fast/slow). The scales have been described in detail by Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci, and Percy H. Tannenbaum, *The Measurement of Meaning* (Urbana, 1957).

Other terms that differ from one another in their associations are

|                    |                |                    |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| <i>slim</i>        | <i>thin</i>    | <i>skinny</i>      |
| <i>expeditious</i> | <i>quick</i>   | <i>hasty</i>       |
| <i>resolute</i>    | <i>decided</i> | <i>obstinate</i>   |
| <i>reward</i>      | <i>payment</i> | <i>bribe</i>       |
| <i>emulate</i>     | <i>imitate</i> | <i>counterfeit</i> |
| <i>conserve</i>    | <i>save</i>    | <i>hoard</i>       |

Not all sets of words will have the same distance between their members on the scale, but most English speakers are likely to feel that the left column is somewhat better than the central column, and the right column decidedly worse.

The associations we are concerned with are between words, not things. That is true whether the association is an emotional one or not. Our decision to call a woman *slim* instead of *skinny* has nothing to do with her weight or measurements; it is a consequence of our wish to compliment rather than insult her. *Slim* has associations with desirable words, and *skinny* with unflattering ones. Either word that we use drags along behind it willy-nilly a long train of associations. So too the words *dove* and *pigeon* refer to the same bird and thus have the same sense. But their difference in association prevents them from being freely interchangeable. In fact the associations of *dove* and *pigeon* differ so much that some speakers are reluctant to believe the two words name the same bird, yet any standard encyclopedia will make clear that there is no difference in their reference. *Dove* gets its associations from contexts like *the \_\_\_\_\_ of peace, harmless as \_\_\_\_\_, Oh, that I had wings like a \_\_\_\_\_*, and *The moan of \_\_\_\_\_s in immemorial elms*, whereas *pigeon* is associated with such contexts as *a clay \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_-toed, a \_\_\_\_\_ for the swindlers*, and *\_\_\_\_\_ droppings on the street*. In one dimension *dove* and *pigeon* mean the same thing, but in another they certainly do not. Try switching the two words in the foregoing contexts to see how incongruous the associations are. It is quite common among Christians to symbolize the Holy Ghost as a dove, but to say the Holy Ghost is a pigeon would verge on sacrilege. The associations are not with the bird itself, but with the name used for it.

Words relating to sex, excretion, death, and for many people also birth can have very powerful emotional associations, but here also the associations are with the word and not the thing. Thus the term *coitus* is nowadays not likely to bring a blush to the most maidenly of cheeks, but the Anglo-Saxon term of the same sense, though known to all and used increasingly in modern fiction, still cannot be printed in ordinary expository writing. That restriction is cause for neither sorrow nor rejoicing; it is just one of the facts about our language and our society. The world would not be a great deal better place in which to live if the fact were otherwise.



When a word like the unnamed terms we have been referring to has such strong emotional associations that it is barred from polite use, the word is said to be **taboo**. All cultures seem to have taboo words, although it is impossible to predict just what words will become taboo, as you might expect from the fact that associations are with them rather than with the things they name.<sup>8</sup> Among some groups, certain words relating to eating are frowned upon. Not so long ago in English *breast* and *leg* were taboo, with the result that, in America at least, the terms *white meat* and *dark meat* came to be used for chickens, and proper Victorian young ladies are supposed to have clasped their hands to their chests with horror if anyone misnamed the limb of a piano. That may be something of an exaggeration, but it has been reported that when George Bernard Shaw had a young girl proclaim, "Not bloody likely!" in his 1914 play *Pygmalion*, the London opening-night audience gasped in shock. *Bloody* was a term so strongly taboo in British English, although completely innocuous to an American, that it was not supposed to be used except by the lowest dregs of society, from whom anything might be expected. Why was *bloody* (and to some extent it still is) such a taboo word? Americans and some Englishmen who have puzzled over the cause have suspected a hidden reference to obscene or sacrilegious matters. The history of the word is obscure, but the truth seems to be that it has never referred to anything at all in English. It is a word with no sense, but only a powerful association, restricted in its use to a scorned social group among whom, however, it is so prevalent as to constitute an identifying mark. And since nobody in the respectable middle classes wanted to be identified with the riffraff, the word *bloody*, highly characteristic of those lower orders, became taboo.

There are three general sorts of taboo, depending on the kind of offense given by a word. **Profanity** offends against religion. It involves casual reference to the deity, the saints, or other religious matters: *for chrissake; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph*. The taboo against profanity is the weakest of the lot. Much stronger is the taboo relating to **obscenity**, an offense against morals. Here belong the sex-related terms. Last, **vulgarity** is an offense against good taste. *Bloody* is a prime example, although most death-related taboo words are also thought to be in poor taste. Taboo words referring to excretion and birth have the distinction of being both vulgar and obscene, since they also suggest sex. It is curious that both our coming into the world and our leaving it should violate good taste. But there is no disputing taboos.

Language has to compensate somehow for the existence of taboo words since the things named by them must, after all, still be discussed from time to time. The compensating device is known as **euphemism**, a word of Greek origin whose etymological meaning is 'good-speak.' A euphemism is any term

<sup>8</sup>There are also taboos on things, but they are not our concern here.



that replaces a taboo word in the language. It may be either a new use of an old word, for instance *chest* and *limb* given new work as euphemisms for the mildly taboo *breast* and *leg*; or it may be newly concocted expressly to replace the taboo word, such as the nursery terms relating to a child's excretory processes, of which *potty* and *wee-wee* are instances. Taboo and euphemisms are relative matters. There are speakers for whom the nursery terms just referred to are more vulgar than plain-spoken words.

Sometimes the taboo against an item is relatively mild, so that speakers are not impelled to replace it with a euphemism; yet they may still prefer to do so out of a longing for refinement. The use of *stomach* for *belly*, *perspire* for *sweat*, *saliva* for *spittle* or *spit*, *intestine* for *gut*, and *matter* for *pus* originally had that motive. Such refined terms are called *genteelisms*, though some of those cited have now become the usual terms.

Another kind of euphemism is that involved in genteel swearing. Terms of opposite sense are substituted for swear words, like *heavens* for *hell* or *bless it* for *damn it*. If the euphemism is more or less a nonsense word it may be chosen deliberately to suggest the taboo word by its sound, for instance *gosh darn it* for *God damn it*, *blooming* for *bloody*, *Jiminy Crickets* for *Jesus Christ*, and *the deuce* for *the devil*. Such *minced forms* are used by those who have the inclination but not the courage to swear honestly. The euphemism, whatever its kind, differs from its corresponding taboo item in that its associations are better and more proper, but especially in that they are weaker. Compared to the full-blooded quality of taboo words, euphemisms are all anemic.

The importance of a word's associations can hardly be overstated. We choose our words not only to give information about things, but to establish an atmosphere of cooperation, to express our feelings, to evoke feelings in others, and to persuade others to act as we want them to—uses of language that we will take up in the next chapter. Associations play a major role in the language of advertising, of politics, and of literature. Indeed in those three kinds of language, a word's associations may outweigh its sense.

The grammatical function of an item, to pass on to the third dimension of meaning, is simply its part of speech. It is the way the item relates to other units of language in grammatical structures such as phrases and clauses. Since we have already looked at this subject in the preceding chapter, we will pass over it here without further comment.

The scope of a word, the fourth dimension of its meaning, is the way it relates to some particular variety of the language.<sup>9</sup> The variety mentioned earlier was *geographical dialect*. The American meaning of *biscuit* is quite different from the British meaning; consequently, the scope of the word with respect to the two dialects is also different. A geographical dialect, it must

<sup>9</sup>For the classification of language varieties see J. C. Catford's *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (London, 1965), p. 83 ff.

be remembered, is simply the variety of the language spoken in some particular place, not necessarily a quaint or outlandish form of speech. In popular use the term *dialect* often means 'the funny way somebody else talks as compared to the normal, regular way I speak,' but no such implication attaches to the term as it is used in this book. Another example of geographical limitation is the term *hushpuppy*, which is widely known in all parts of the United States as a brand name for shoes, but which in the southern states has a much older use as the name for a small fried ball of cornbread. So also, around Boston *tonic* may refer to what is known in the rest of the country as *soda* or *pop*, and anyone who has traveled from one region to another will have observed similar differences in the geographical scope of words.

Two other important language varieties are **historical dialect**, resulting from the changes a language undergoes in time, and **social dialect**, language differences that correlate with class distinctions. These varieties are illustrated in Chapters 9 and 2 respectively, so nothing more need be said about them here. There are still other dialects that are less important for English, for example **sexual dialect**. Some languages have, in addition to the general form of speech, a special variety reserved for the exclusive use of one of the sexes. Something of the sort can be seen even in English. Suppose you get a postcard with this message: "Having such a marvelous time. The weather's been just heavenly and the scenery's too glorious for words. How we do wish you could share the wonderful time we're having. John and Marcia." It is probable that Marcia wrote the card. There is also **age dialect**, for instance, the characteristic, albeit ever-changing, slang of teen-agers, which when used by those over thirty is either comic or pathetic.

Another kind of language variety is **register**, a form of language appropriate to a limited situation. A word may have a special sense when used to talk about a particular subject, like music, linguistics, photography, or physiology. Thus the word *tone* refers in the musical expression *whole tone* to 'the interval between the first two degrees of a major scale,' in linguistics it refers to 'a musical pitch of the voice that serves to change the meaning of a word,' in photography to 'the color of a photograph,' and in physiology to 'the state of the body with respect to the health and vigor of its functions.' The special varieties of language used by bureaucrats and scientists, sociologists and hucksters, preachers and sports announcers, are all special registers of English. So also is the special form of English called baby talk, but used by adults in addressing infants, pets, and lovers. When you come across a sample of such language you can place the speaker or writer in a category without paying much attention to the sense of his words. The kind of words chosen and the way they are combined are enough to mark the language as officialese, Madison Avenue talk, or sports patter. Some varieties of English, such as criminal argot, are at once a register and a social dialect. When a

pickpocket says, "I was out gandering around for a soft mark and made a tip that was going to cop a short,"<sup>10</sup> he identifies not only his profession but also the social group to which he belongs because the two are largely coterminous.

**Style** is a language variation that depends on the relationship between the speaker and his hearers. It is a scale involving continuous gradations from the most formal and aloof to the most informal and familiar. As with other continuous scales it is useful to divide it somewhat arbitrarily into several distinct kinds. In Chapter 2, we dealt with formal, colloquial, and slang styles or functional varieties; if we wish more divisions we can, with Martin Joos, speak of these five:<sup>11</sup>

|              |              |                    |              |                |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|
| frozen style | formal style | consultative style | casual style | intimate style |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|

Style, as Chapter 2 showed, is often confused with "correctness," the odd assumption being made that language gets "better" as it becomes more formal, whereas in fact all styles are equally good when they are appropriate. **Frozen style** is literary, ritualistic; it is rich in meanings, perhaps on several levels at once, is highly structured, and may include archaisms. An example is John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, including the often quoted "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," with its mirrored clauses, the archaic "ask not," and the introductory "and" reminiscent of Biblical language. **Formal style** is the language appropriate to lecturing; it is carefully organized and omits few details of fact or expression. **Consultative style** is the polite colloquial language used between strangers or casual acquaintances; it is spontaneous but explains matters fully and typically involves continual responses from the hearers. **Casual style**, appropriate to friends who have much in common, omits facts that are unnecessary between intimates, abridges the form of expression by contractions and sentence fragments, and uses slang as a signal of membership in an in-group. The **intimate style** is used between those who know each other so well that language is hardly needed. It is marked by an extreme curtailment of expression and many private meanings. When a father says "Herbie" to his son, the name alone can carry a complex message that depends on the situation and shared experience in the past. It might mean 'Don't put so much food in your mouth at once' or 'Be home

<sup>10</sup>From David W. Maurer, *Whiz Mob, PADS*, No. 24 (1955).

<sup>11</sup>*The Five Clocks* (New York, 1967).

by 11:00 this time' or 'I'm not going to tell you again to cut the grass.' Meanings vary according to style. Thus *you may* in the sense 'you have permission' is relatively formal, whereas *mad* in the sense 'angry' is relatively informal.

The final language variety we will deal with is **mode**, of which there are two main kinds: speech and writing.<sup>12</sup> Mode has to do with how language differs according to the medium of its expression. No one writes and speaks in exactly the same way. In talking to someone we can use hand gestures, facial expression, and the tone of our voice to help get across the message we are delivering. In writing, those auxiliary signals are denied us; consequently we must compensate by being rather more explicit in our use of words than we need be in speech. Moreover, in most speech a sentence once uttered is irrevocable. It can be contradicted, but not destroyed. In writing, on the other hand, we can erase, rephrase, cross out, write again. Because written language has the possibility of being edited in a way that speech does not have, it is hardly surprising that there should be differences in language according to whether it is expressed in sound or on paper.

But apart from necessary differences there are quite arbitrary ones that depend on the medium of expression. If A is talking to B on the telephone, he might say something we can represent imperfectly as "I'm pretty sure Jones's bunch'll go along." If however A decided to drop B a line instead of phoning, the note, however informal and hastily written, is likely to differ in some ways from the spoken message. For instance, A might write, "I'm fairly sure Jones' group will go along," making a number of changes that are not essential.

Other things being equal, writing tends to be rather more formal than speech. The person we are addressing, the subject, and the general situation can all be the same for writing and for talking, but there is something about putting a pen to paper that encourages us to shift into a less relaxed and slightly more aloof style. The cause is probably that talk is a perfectly familiar activity we do all the time, whereas we write much less often. Consequently when we face the unfamiliar medium we automatically tighten up. Mode and style intermesh just like register and social dialect. In fact any language variation may sometimes hook together with any other. Their mutual interdependence is one of the reasons for lumping them in a single dimension, the scope of the word.

Some of the dimensions of meaning that we have been examining, particularly scope, are not usually thought of as meaning at all. Yet it is clear that if someone speaks to us in a confidential manner, the style of his speech

<sup>12</sup> Both speech and writing have subvarieties such as face-to-face speech versus telephone speech, and pen-and-paper writing versus telegraphic writing.

has meaning for us. If someone speaks in what is often called a New England twang, his geographical dialect tells us something. And if his language is a nonstandard social dialect it carries an extra message beyond the plain sense. It is then quite reasonable to think of all the ways that words relate to other words and to the world as kinds of meaning.

## Exercises

9. Do the italicized words in each pair of sentences have the same sense?
  1. The *stakes* that were to support the fence were too long.  
The *stakes* that they were playing for were too high.
  2. There is a *mountain* near the lake.  
He is a *mountain* of a man.
  3. The pillows were stuffed with *down*.  
The horse galloped across the unfenced *down*.
  4. He was the fourth *man* to help with the ship.  
He was the fourth to help *man* the ship.
  5. You will never get to first *base*.  
You are way off *base*.
10. How do the following words differ from one another in sense—that is, what semantic features distinguish the members of each pair?
 

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. stocking, sock  | 5. meat, fish       |
| 2. boot, shoe      | 6. vegetable, fruit |
| 3. cup, mug        | 7. cow, calf        |
| 4. goblet, tumbler | 8. stallion, mare   |
11. How do the following words differ from each other in emotional value? Write the seven categories of the good-bad scale across the top of a sheet of paper; then write each word under the heading that seems most appropriate.
 

|                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. politician, statesman      | 6. haggle, negotiate      |
| 2. civil servant, bureaucrat  | 7. explore, snoop         |
| 3. pedant, scholar            | 8. flatter, praise        |
| 4. guess, hypothesis          | 9. thrifty, stingy        |
| 5. inquisition, investigation | 10. extravagant, generous |
12. Real-estate salesmen were given the following bits of advice, cited in *Consumer Reports*, XXXIII (1968), 454. What is the difference in association between the expressions?

1. Call houses "homes."
  2. Call commissions "brokerage fees."
  3. Call a deal an "opportunity."
  4. Call a home's cost the client's "investment."
  5. Call a lot a "home site."
  6. Call a contract an "agreement."
- 13.** Suggest some euphemisms for the following words: stupid, pregnant, janitor, intoxicated, underwear.
- 14.** Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death* and Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* contain various euphemisms from the burial trade, among which are the following. What does each stand for?
- |                       |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. the loved one      | 6. memorial park          |
| 2. the bereaved       | 7. inhumement             |
| 3. funeral home       | 8. columbarium            |
| 4. floral arrangement | 9. mortuary science       |
| 5. casket suit        | 10. before-need provision |
- 15.** Rewrite each of the following sentences twice, once to give a favorable slant and once to give an unfavorable one.
1. Approximately fifty young men and women demonstrated outside the Army Recruiting Office in opposition to war.
  2. This law would prohibit racial discrimination in the sale or rental of any housing or land.
  3. Some economists believe the federal government should guarantee every adult citizen a minimum annual wage.
  4. This petition favors the unrestricted sale and possession of firearms.
  5. Do you think we should increase, decrease, or maintain the present level of foreign aid?
  6. A speaker introduced as Dr. Leary gave arguments in favor of legalizing marijuana.
- 16.** Describe the limitations on the scope of the following words. In answering, use both the dictionary and your own feeling for language.
- |             |            |                   |
|-------------|------------|-------------------|
| 1. brethren | 6. folks   | 11. looking glass |
| 2. cadenza  | 7. frat    | 12. smearcase     |
| 3. childe   | 8. gest    | 13. somewhere     |
| 4. daft     | 9. hisself | 14. suspire       |
| 5. flunk    | 10. lass   | 15. telly         |



## HOW TO DEFINE A WORD

When we consider that every word reaches out to its context along many dimensions simultaneously, we see what a complex thing meaning is. No dictionary can be expected to record a word's multidimensional meaning in all its fullness, yet dictionaries do manage to tell something about all four kinds. They define a word's scope by usage labels; its function by a part-of-speech label; and its associations in various ways, chiefly by including in the definition words with similar associations or illustrative quotations that show the word used in context. A dictionary's definition, however, is primarily a statement of the sense of the word, and when we talk about what a word means, it is chiefly a definition of the sense we have in mind.

There are three broad purposes a definition can serve. It can describe what a word usually means; it can stipulate what a word is to mean under special circumstances; or it can prescribe what a word ought to mean. A **descriptive definition** is what dictionaries try to give; it is a report of how the word is actually used either by English speakers generally or by particular groups such as New Englanders, musicians, linguists, thieves, and so forth. It is the kind of definition we will be mainly concerned with.

A **stipulative definition** is like a short-term contract between the speaker and the hearer that expires as soon as their conversation is done. Or it is like a house rule in cards that specifies "We don't play one-bids" or "The deuce of clubs is wild"; it is not a regular part of the rules of the game but is invented anew and must be agreed to each time the game is played. A stipulative definition is a special rule laid down to govern the use of some word in a particular situation, and consequently does not get recorded in dictionaries. Such definitions, however, are common in scholarly writings or wherever there is need for great precision of statement. For example, here is a stipulative definition:

A complex phrase is defined as one containing more than one (form of a) full verb.<sup>13</sup>

The usual meaning of *complex phrase* would be something like 'complicated group of words,' but the writer chose to stipulate for it a special meaning that suited the needs of his subject. By "is defined as" he did not intend 'is generally used by people to mean,' but rather 'is going to be used in this study to mean.' Stipulative definitions are invaluable when we are talking about technical matters for which the common vocabulary does not have clear, precise terms. The only danger is that we may confuse them with descriptive definitions and consequently get into a profitless haggles about whether or not they are correct. A descriptive definition can be right or wrong;

<sup>13</sup>F. R. Palmer, *A Linguistic Study of the English Verb* (London, 1965), p. 150.

a stipulative definition cannot. The former is right if it is an accurate report of how people use words and wrong otherwise. A stipulative definition, however, is not a report, but a rule which like all rules can be neither right nor wrong but just is. Such rules can be useful or useless, pleasant or unpleasant, but not correct or incorrect.

In *Through the Looking-Glass* Lewis Carroll had fun with the two kinds of definitions and their confusion. Humpty Dumpty has just explained what an unbirthday present is:

“There’s glory for you!”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Alice, who had never heard of stipulative definitions, thought Humpty Dumpty was wrong because he did not describe the meaning that *glory* generally has, whereas he stoutly defended his right to stipulate what any word is to mean in a given situation. Yet, in a way Alice was right because stipulative definitions belong to technical language and not to ordinary conversation. If one mark of an intellectual is a fondness for technicalities, Humpty Dumpty was a true egghead.

The third purpose a definition can serve is one we need not take with much seriousness. The **prescriptive definition** lays down the law about what a word should mean. It limits itself neither to a report of actual use nor to a rule for a special situation, but instead aims at dictating what everyone ought to do under all circumstances. For instance:

MARY JANE: I think I’ll drop out because I’ve gotten disinterested in things.

MISS FIDDITCH: You mustn’t say *disinterested* when you intend a lack of interest or boredom. *Disinterested* really means (that is, ought to mean) ‘impartial’ rather than ‘uninterested.’

The facts are that some people use *disinterested* to mean ‘impartial’ while others use it to mean ‘uninterested,’ although ironically the meaning which is supposed to be “wrong” is actually the older of the two senses. Because of its ambiguity many people nowadays quite sensibly avoid the word alto-

gether. If you have to use it, there may be persuasive reasons for choosing one definition or the other, but they will have nothing to do with the “real meaning” of the word, because there are no “real meanings” apart from actual use. The only answer to give people like Miss Fidditch who pontificate about what a word ought to mean is “How do you know?”

So far, we have decided that a dictionary definition is mainly about a word’s sense or relation to things and that the definition aims at describing the sense as it is actually used by speakers of English. Now we will look at six ways of making a definition. We need more than one method of defining because words differ from one another in their kind of meaning. We have already seen that the sense of a word like *chair* can be divided into semantic features, whereas that of a word like *red* is not capable of being so analyzed, and a word like *to* in *I want to go* has no sense at all but only a grammatical function. The same method of definition will not be equally effective or even possible for all words or in all situations.

A method that has been recognized as a definition only in the twentieth century but is now much favored in scientific use is the **operational definition**. It does not describe a word’s meaning directly, but instead gives a list of directions that tell the user how to find or to make the thing named by the word. For example, an operational definition of *height* might go something like this:

To find the height of a room, take a tape measure. Fasten the beginning end of the tape on the floor next to a wall. Extend the tape vertically along the wall until it reaches the ceiling. Note the figure on the tape measure at the point where it touches the ceiling. That figure is the height of the room.

Notice that this definition does not define *height* in the abstract, but only the height of some particular thing. In much the same way a recipe for making chocolate mousse can be thought of as an operational definition of the term *chocolate mousse*.

Another definition that also focuses on the things named by a word is the **ostensive definition**. *Ostensive* comes from a Latin word that means ‘to show,’ which is exactly what this definition does. If someone hands you a dish of chocolate mousse and says, “This is what *chocolate mousse* means,” he has defined the term ostensively. Clearly a dictionary cannot hand you real objects to define them, but it can do the next best thing—it can use pictures. If a dictionary-maker wants to define *French horn*, or *wigwam*, or *Gothic* as applied to architecture, he may find that the old saw about one picture being worth a thousand words still cuts straight to the heart of things. Pictures in a dictionary are not just decoration; they are a form of ostensive definition, describing a word’s sense by showing the thing it names.

**Definition by context**, or more precisely by verbal context, is to words what

the ostensive definition is to things. Instead of pointing out an object or situation that the word refers to, a contextual definition quotes some utterances that show how it is used. Earlier in this chapter we arrived at the meaning of *piggin* by looking at some sentences that included the word. Taken together and without any additional explanation, those sentences would be a contextual definition. So also *bug* has a number of senses, but the following quotations define one of them with fair clarity: "He's a bug on proper training of young shooters"; "She was a bug at languages"; "a perfect bug for detail."<sup>14</sup> The larger dictionaries use this method of definition when they give illustrative citations.

Synonyms are words that might be found in approximately the same contexts and therefore are more or less equivalent in meaning. **Definition by synonym** merely lists such terms. Thus a synonymic definition of *drug* would be 'narcotic'; of *chronometer*, 'timepiece'; and of *beautiful*, 'lovely, handsome, pretty, comely.' To be useful, the synonym should be more familiar or clearer than the term being defined. It would hardly do to say that *red* means 'gules,' although the reverse statement, that *gules* means 'red,' is perfectly reasonable. No definition of any kind should be more difficult than the term it defines, although for very familiar words, like *walk*, *brother*, and *good*, it is hardly possible to imagine a definition that would simplify the word. One severe problem with synonymic definition is that two words do not often have exactly the same sense and probably never have the same total meaning. We will look at this and some related problems in the next section.

**Definition by example** names particular specimens or members of the general class being defined. For example, we can define *bovine* by saying that it is 'any creature like the cow, ox, water buffalo, bison,' or *drug* as 'opium, hashish, marijuana, heroin, LSD, and so forth.' *Red* can be defined as 'the color of fresh blood, ripe strawberries and tomatoes, or glowing coals,' and *chronometer* as 'clock, watch, sundial, or hourglass.' Usually definition by example has to be content with mentioning a few specimens of the defined term, but sometimes it is possible to make a complete list. The grammatical term *article* can be defined in English as '*a*, *an*, or *the*,' and that is probably the most efficient way of doing it.

Because **formal definition** is the one most used in dictionaries we are likely to think of it as the regular way of defining. It specifies the semantic features that make up the sense of a word. Thus our earlier definition of *chair* as 'a seat, with a back, for one person' was formal. The traditional method of defining a word formally has two parts. First it tells what semantic class (**genus**) the word is a member (**species**) of, and second it lists the attributes (**differentiae**) that make the word semantically different from all other mem-

<sup>14</sup>Cited in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass., 1961), p. 291.

bers of the same class. In the case of the species *chair*, the genus was 'seat' and there were two differentiae, 'with a back' and 'for one person.' In its turn *seat* must be taken as a species to be defined, perhaps as 'a thing (genus) to sit on (differentia).'

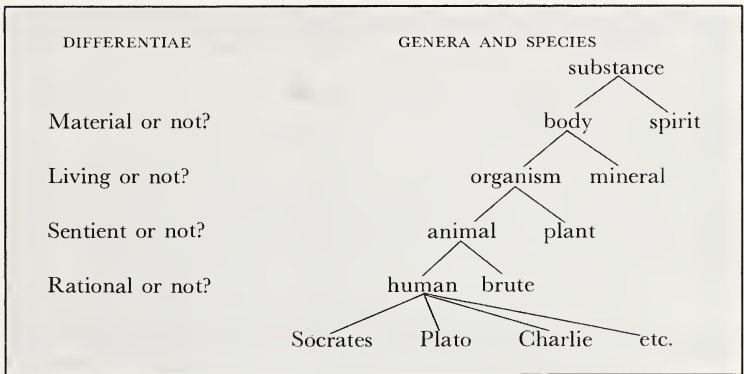
Formal definition presupposes an elaborate classification of meanings inside meanings inside meanings. Indeed, if we had a set of consistent formal definitions for all words in our language, we would have a classification of the world as English sees it. However, no such grand semantic scheme exists, so the formal definitions in a dictionary are always inconsistent with one another.

In the past men have tried to invent something like a comprehensive classification of ideas. The Dewey Decimal system for ordering books according to their subject aims in that direction, and in the seventeenth century an English bishop, John Wilkins, invented an artificial language whose vocabulary was systematically ordered into genera and species. His word for 'element' was *de*, for 'fire' *deb*, 'air' *ded*, 'water' *deg*, 'earth' *dep*, each built out of the word *de*. Similarly the word for 'water' serves as the base for 'cloud' *dega*, 'rain' *dege*, 'frost' *degi*. Thus each word indicates its meaning by its pronunciation. Wilkins, one of the learned founders of the Royal Society, which is among the most prestigious scientific bodies in the world, hoped that his philosophical language (as he called it) would be taken up by scientists since it allowed for greater precision of speech than any natural tongue. There is, however, no evidence that anyone, including Wilkins himself, succeeded in learning the language well enough to use it. If they had, they would surely have discovered that the classification underlying the vocabulary was too limited to be practical. Two hundred years later another member of the Royal Society, Peter Roget, brought forth a similar classification in his *Thesaurus*, which listed words by their meaning instead of alphabetically. Some contemporary thesauruses still use Roget's scheme although others have abandoned it for alphabetical order.

Perhaps the oldest and most famous classification is that known as the Tree of Porphyry because it was authored by the neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyry and is a treelike, branching diagram, one form of which is shown below. If we take 'human' as an example, we can see from the diagram that it is a class with respect to the individuals, Socrates, Plato, Charlie, and a good many others; but it is a member, along with 'brute,' of the larger class 'animal.' Thus, a single term can be both genus and species: 'animal' is the genus of 'human' but a species of 'organism.'

The last three methods of definition we have examined can be explained by reference to the Tree of Porphyry. When we define by synonyms (a human is a man), we stay at the same level of the tree, merely substituting one term for another. When we define by example (a human is someone like Socrates,

## THE TREE OF PORPHYRY



Plato, or Charlie), we move down the tree toward specifics.<sup>15</sup> When we define formally (a human is an animal with reason), we move up the tree toward generalities, although we must also tell how the term differs from other members of its larger class (in this case by the feature 'rational').

The Tree of Porphyry is only one example of the numerous ways things in the universe might be classified. It is true that some men have thought it was an essentially right way of sorting things out, but in fact there are always more ways than one of classifying the same group of things. When we think about classifying everything in the universe, we are faced with a potentially infinite number of different schemes. The world as such has no classification inherent in it, but our language imposes one upon it. Generally when we try to sort out things into various groups, it is the semantic classification of our mother tongue that we follow, although we may be under the impression that we are reacting to differences that are essential to the things themselves. Thus, an English speaker told to sort objects into piles of similar colors will put things whose color he would call *orange* into one pile and things he would call *yellow* into another pile. The Zuni speaker on the other hand will put all those objects into the same pile since he uses a single color word for them. Only a deliberate short circuit of the linguistic wiring will let us recognize that orange and yellow can be seen as quite similar, or let the Zuni Indian realize that they can be thought of as very different. The short circuit is by no means impossible, nor even extremely

<sup>15</sup>Our words *specific* and *general* come from the Latin terms *species* and *genus* (plural *genera*).



difficult, as some proponents of the Whorf hypothesis have thought, but it does require an effort of the will. Under normal conditions our language provides the way we categorize the world, so that much of the meaning we find in the universe is projected upon it from our speech.

## Exercises

17. Are the following definitions descriptive, stipulative, or prescriptive in aim?
  1. *Sistrum* means 'a metal rattle used in Egyptian religious ceremonies.'
  2. *Raise* should mean 'promote the growth of crops or animals,' not 'bring children to maturity,' for which the proper word is *rear*.
  3. By *authentic sense* I mean 'the sense intended by the speaker, in contrast to the sense interpreted by the hearer.'
  4. *Mad* means only 'insane' or 'frenzied' or 'affected with rabies.'
  5. *Quick* sometimes means 'living' rather than 'fast,' although only rarely and in limited contexts.
  6. In the rules for walking-races, *walk* will mean 'a form of movement in which the heel of one foot touches the ground before the toe of the other foot loses contact with the ground.'
18. The following definitions illustrate the six methods (operational, ostensive, contextual, synonymic, exemplificative, and formal) discussed in the preceding pages. How do these definitions differ from one another?
  1. ampersand: &
  2. epic: a poem like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungenlied*, or *Paradise Lost*
  3. pulse: Rest the fingers of the left hand lightly on the underside of the right wrist just above the arteries. The faint expansion and contraction perceptible to the touch is the pulse.
  4. station: We arrived at the station half an hour early, so stood on the platform waiting for the train to pull in.
  5. stone: gem, jewel, precious stone
  6. stone: diamond, ruby, sapphire, emerald
  7. wander: move without a fixed goal
  8. mold: Keep a slice of bread for several days in a damp, dark place. It will develop a furry coating called mold.
  9. obelisk: a mark like this: †
  10. obelisk: the dagger, obelus

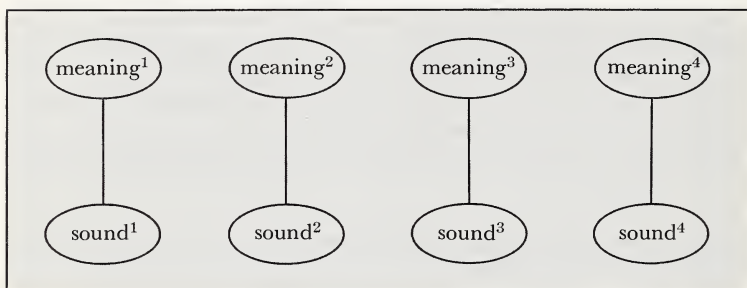
11. obelisk: a dagger-shaped mark used to refer from the text to a note
12. obelisk: It was clearly a scholarly work, for the page was pierced with obelisks.
19. Choose some term whose meaning is quite familiar to you and define it in as many as possible of the six ways mentioned in the preceding question.
20. Each of the following classifications contains one member that is inconsistent with the others. Tell (a) what subject is being classified, (b) on what basis the members are differentiated, (c) which member is inconsistent. For example:
- charcoal, oil, pastel, portrait, watercolor
- (a) Types of pictures are being classified. (b) The basis of differentiation is the material used. (c) *Portrait* is inconsistent because it refers to the subject matter.
1. crooner, bass, baritone, tenor, countertenor
  2. detective, western, science fiction, historical fiction, short story
  3. swimming, golf, tennis, baseball, soccer
  4. chiropody, internal medicine, veterinary, ophthalmology, dermatology
  5. physics, botany, zoology, science, chemistry
  6. noun, object, verb, adverb, adjective
21. Make a classification of each of the following subjects according to some appropriate basis of differentiation. State the basis you are using and be sure all members of your classification are consistent with it. For example, you might classify paintings as portraits, still lifes, or landscapes on the basis of their subject matter.
- |                           |                |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1. musical compositions   | 6. periodicals |
| 2. theatrical productions | 7. foodstuff   |
| 3. football players       | 8. sports      |
| 4. government officials   | 9. buildings   |
| 5. aircraft               | 10. animals    |

## SYNONYMS AND HOMONYMS

If language were so arranged that it provided exactly one meaning for every pronunciation and exactly one pronunciation for every meaning, life would be neater than it is. Imagine for a moment a language like that. Let

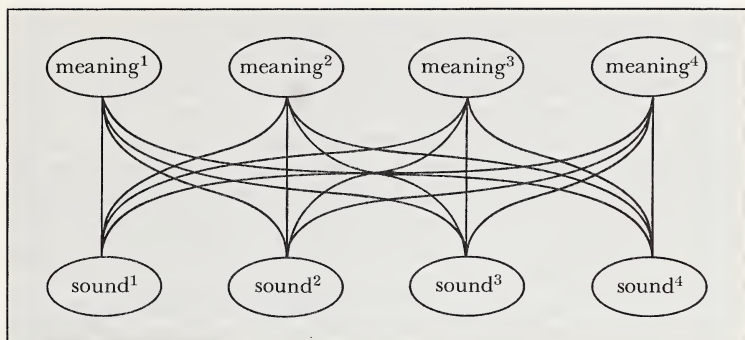
us say it is the language spoken on Mars. We can see what Martian would be like from the following diagram, with its neat, orderly one-to-one relationship between meanings and sounds. Whenever a Martian wants to express a particular idea, he has one, and only one, right way to do it. He need only pronounce the sounds that correspond to the meanings he has in mind to express himself with perfect clarity; thus, whenever one Martian hears another talking, he knows with complete certainty exactly what ideas the speaker intends. Martian is a perfect language, that is, perfectly clear and perfectly precise. It is the ultimate in scientific and logical languages, entirely fitting for a species renowned for its engineering feats.

### MARTIAN



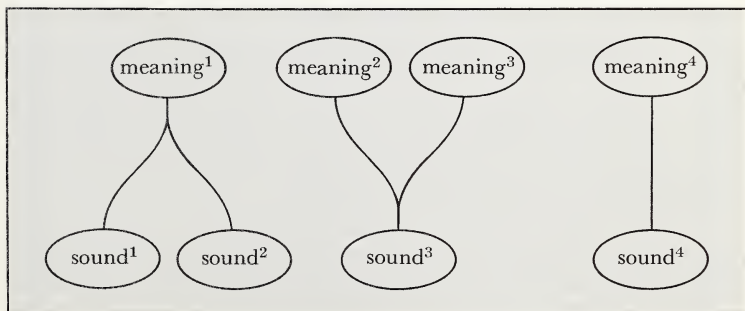
Now let us imagine the opposite sort of language. They speak it on Venus, we will say. Any meaning can be expressed by every sound in the language, as the multiple connecting lines of the following diagram suggest. There is no wrong way to express any idea a Venusian may have in mind. Whatever meaning he intends, he can use any of the sounds of the language that happen to appeal to him at the moment. An odd result of this perfect freedom of choice is that, when one Venusian hears another talking, he has absolutely no way of knowing, from the words alone, what the other means. Venusian is a perfect language—that is, perfectly ambiguous and perfectly equivocal, a fitting tongue for the inhabitants of the planet of love. How the Venusians have managed to develop a culture with a totally ambiguous form of speech remains something of a mystery, but it may be supposed that they communicate directly by telepathy. Their language then is purely esthetic in its uses.

## VENUSIAN



All of the natural languages of this earth are mixtures of the Martian and the Venusian ideals. Certain forms of communication we use, like mathematics, chemical formulas, and instructions written for computers, are almost pure Martian. Other forms of communication—like the bebop patter used in jazz, some of Gertrude Stein's poetry, and the glossolalia or "speaking in tongues" of some religious groups—are almost pure Venusian. But none of those things is language in quite the way normal English is. Our everyday, usual language is a bit Martian and a bit Venusian; and in the combination lies its strength. As the Tellurian diagram suggests, we often have several pronunciations for one meaning, or several meanings for one pronunciation, or sometimes even a one-to-one correspondence between them. On the whole, you would have to say that we are more Martian, but both tendencies are there.

## TELLURIAN (EARTH TALK)



The Martian tendency is the scientific ideal of language, which values precision and clarity above all else. The Venusian tendency is the artistic ideal, which likes its meanings to multiply and cherishes variety of expression. All of us probably realize the importance of the Martian ideal. Our culture tends to emphasize it. From the antiseptic and oxygen-tented bed, which has supplanted the cradle as our first resting place, to the incorrodible, solid-copper, seamless, satin-upholstered, French-provincial-style innerspring deposit casket, which has all but robbed the grave of its victory as our last resting place, we live in a world engineered by science. The physical accomplishments of science are apparent to all, its intellectual accomplishments to an increasingly large number. We need small urging to accept the value of clarity in language.

It may not be equally apparent that ambiguity has its uses. If we try to translate *Hamlet* into Martian, we will encounter a few difficulties. When King Claudius's black conscience has trapped him into revealing that he murdered his brother, he calls out "Lights! I will to bed!" Since the clarity of Martian will allow only one meaning for each expression, we will have to suppose that Claudius is merely asking for candles to light his way to bed, and nothing more. Several other levels of meaning will have been lost, and poetry will have been turned into prose. All Martians will be the poorer for it. But it is not only in literary use that ambiguity has its value. Our daily speech is full of ambiguities without which we could scarcely carry on the affairs of the community. When we thank a hostess for a nice party, compliment a woman on a nice dress, or refer to a nice girl, we are talking almost pure Venusian. If the day should ever come when we have to speak with clarity and precision about parties, dresses, and girls, the continued existence of the body politic will be in jeopardy. Always to say what he really means is a kind of reality that man cannot stand very much of. The vague Venusian may be infuriating to talk with, but the precise Martian is a social menace.

When two or more expressions share the same or highly similar meanings each is said to be a **synonym** of the others. Perfectly synonymous terms are extremely rare. Indeed they probably do not exist at all in our usual day-to-day speech. *Sphere*, *globe*, and *orb* are synonyms much of the time; for example any of the three could be used in the sentence "The earth is a great \_\_\_\_." However, if we are to talk about "a \_\_\_\_ of influence," or "breaking a light \_\_\_\_," or "scepter and \_\_\_\_," the terms are no longer interchangeable. Most synonyms are equivalent in some contexts only—not in all. Synonymy is thus a matter of degree depending on the number of contexts in which two terms share the same sense.

Part of the reason complete synonyms are rare is that meaning has the many dimensions we have noted. Two of the four dimensions we have been talking about—namely referential sense and grammatical function—combine to make the **basic meaning** of the word. The other two—association and

scope—provide **nuances** of meaning. As long as two items have the same basic meaning we call them synonyms, even though their nuances may differ.

Synonyms are useful because they offer some variety in our choice of words and because they provide a way to express fine shades of meaning. But they are also dangerous when used haphazardly. *Portly*, *plump*, *husky*, and *obese* are synonyms in that they share the same basic meaning, but they are far from equivalent in their associations. A dignified gentleman is portly; a woman is pleasingly plump; a football player is husky; and an unsightly person is obese. Even when the sense is the same, associations seldom are, and thus the total meaning differs. The worst possible way for anyone to increase his vocabulary is to pick new words from a thesaurus to use in place of familiar ones. The nuances are sure to be wrong.

In technical jargon complete synonyms may exist, for instance *toluene* and *methylbenzene*, two chemical terms for the same substance, but even such rare items are likely to be found in somewhat different contexts and thus to develop different nuances of meaning. The closest thing everyday language has to different pronunciations for exactly the same meaning are some of the allomorphs we looked at in Chapter 4 (for instance, *dissyllable* and *disyllable*), but they are two pronunciations for the same word rather than two words for the same meaning.

The other way pronunciation and meaning can fail to match neatly is for two or more meanings to be expressed by identical sounds. Words that are different in meaning but alike in pronunciation, such as *loan* and *lone*, are **homonyms**.<sup>16</sup> English has a good many of them: *stair* and *stare*; *soul* and *sole*; *pair*, *pare*, and *pear*; *to*, *too*, and *two*; *no* and *know*; *flee* and *flea*; *all* and *awl*. As the foregoing examples suggest, homonyms are often alike in pronunciation but different in spelling. That unfortunate fact makes them especially subject to confusion in writing. Almost anybody's list of the ten most misspelled words is going to include homonyms like *their* and *there*, *its* and *it's*, or *to* and *too*. The problem is not that such words are particularly difficult to spell, but rather that they are particularly easy to confuse when one is writing rapidly without due attention to the niceties of orthography.

When homonyms are not only pronounced alike but are also spelled alike, such as *gin* 'machine for separating the seeds from the fiber of the cotton plant' and *gin* 'liquor flavored with the juniper berry,' or *ear* 'the organ of hearing' and *ear* 'kernel-bearing spike of the corn plant,' they offer no special problems in spelling, but they do invite a confusion of meanings. A good many English speakers probably suppose that an ear of corn is so called because of some fancied resemblance to a human or animal ear. Originally

<sup>16</sup>Strictly speaking, words that are alike in sound are **homophones**; those alike in spelling, such as *wind* 'breeze' and *wind* 'to twist,' are **homographs**; and those that are alike in both, such as *fair* 'fiesta' and *fair* 'equitable,' are homonyms. However the term *homonym* is conveniently used to cover any of the three cases.



the words were quite different; it is merely a historical accident that they have come to be pronounced and spelled alike. Perhaps there are also those who think liquid gin is a by-product of cotton manufacture in the decadent South.

Homonyms do, however, have their uses. That form of humor known as the pun, which in our culture requires a groan rather than a laugh as its proper response, uses the homonym for comic effect.

Six hundred girls were sent home from school for wearing miniskirts.  
Teachers decided the student body was showing too much student body.

A nun in new-style garments is one who has kicked the habit.

A marine officer who mistreats his men is rotten to the corps.

Puns are clearly a special case. Usually the context allows only one of two homonymous senses. *Air* can mean either 'the gases that we breathe' or 'a tune,' and we will seldom be in doubt about which is the appropriate sense. "Congress is enacting laws to control \_\_\_\_\_ pollution" and "The words are modern, but the \_\_\_\_\_ is a traditional melody" are contexts that prevent ambiguity. Even when the immediate context is not decisive, for instance, "The \_\_\_\_\_ is lovely," the larger context will usually resolve the uncertainty. Ambiguity does occur in daily conversation, but it is not rife.

When ambiguity exists in some limited context, it is either structural, which we have discussed in the preceding chapter, or lexical. If lexical, it is due either to the fact that two words have the same pronunciation—the homonymy we have just been looking at—or to the fact that one word has several distinct senses. An example of such **polysemy**, or multiple senses, can be seen in the word *head*, which includes among its senses 'that part of the body at the top of the spinal cord, including brain, eyes, mouth, and so forth,' 'the highest part of something, as of stairs,' 'the source, as of a river,' and 'the obverse of a coin.' In fact it is sometimes difficult to decide whether we have several senses for the same word (polysemy) or several words with the same pronunciation (homonymy); even lexicographers and grammarians will not always agree. *Cat* has a different sense in each of the following uses, but whether these are just different meanings of the same word, or whether several different words are involved is problematical:

Our *cat* chases mice.

Right after the elephants came the big *cat*.

You can't trust her, she's a *cat*.

In former times, a mutinous sailor would get the *cat*.

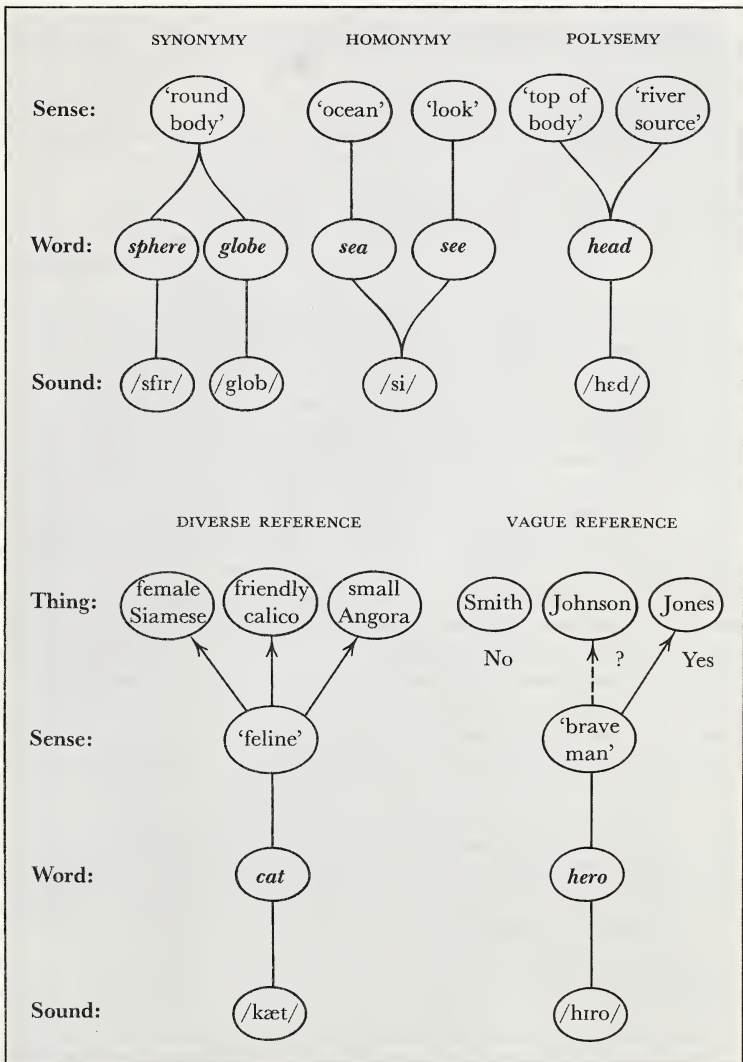
What kind of bait did you use to hook that *cat*?

Al Hirt is my kind of *cat*.

The motor is all right, but one of the tracks on the *cat* broke.

If she wants to *cat* around, let her.

## SEMANTIC IRREGULARITIES



Whether or not all those *cat*'s are the same word, they certainly have different meanings, so we can agree that the pronunciation /kæt/ has the potential of being ambiguous in at least eight ways.

Ambiguity involves several distinct senses because of homonymy or polysemy. A different problem is created by the fact that the things a word names may be very diverse or vague. For example, even a single sense of *cat*, namely 'domestic feline,' can be used to refer to a tabby, a tiger, a calico, an Angora, a Maltese, a Manx, a Siamese, or various other kinds. The creature may be big, little, male, female, dark, light, friendly, or aloof. All that diversity is present, not in the meaning of the word, but in the things named.

In addition to having a great deal of variation that is irrelevant to the sense of their name, things may also lack the sharp, clear distinctions that words have. For instance, we all know that *hero* means 'a man distinguished for exceptional courage'; it is a perfectly clear and distinct sense. But who is a hero, and what persons can the word name? How brave does a man have to be before his courage is exceptional, and what must he be courageous about to be thought distinguished? If Jones enters a burning building to bring out a child, he is a hero, provided the whole building was in flames, but he is not a hero if there was only a trash fire in the basement. The amount of danger determines how exceptional the courage is. If Smith enters a blazing building to bring out his favorite sports coat, he is not a hero but a nut. The object of the courage determines whether it lends distinction. But if Johnson enters a building that is burning, though not blazing, to rescue a little girl's dog, we may be uncertain about his qualifications for heroism. The uncertainty we feel is not about the meaning of *hero* so much as it is about the activities of the man whom the word might name. Similarly, we all know the meanings of *sit* and *lie*. But which is a man doing when he occupies a chaise longue? The words *sit* and *lie* have clear, distinct meanings, whereas the body can assume a vague continuum of positions. It is not meanings but things that are imprecise.

We have discussed some of the ways meaning and pronunciation fail to provide a neat one-to-one match and also two ways meanings and things are skew. These relationships can be schematized as in the diagram on page 221), which shows five irregularities that are found in all the languages of earth. Our vocabulary is neither as logical as the Martians would like nor as unrestrained as the Venusians could want, but it is a characteristically human example of ordered confusion.

## Exercises

22. Supply a synonym for each of the following words, and show how the synonyms differ by using each in a sentence where the other would be inappropriate.

- |            |            |              |                |           |
|------------|------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1. admire  | 3. fiction | 5. famous    | 7. live (verb) | 9. small  |
| 2. amateur | 4. funny   | 6. injustice | 8. occupation  | 10. smell |

23. Each of the following words has at least two homonyms. Give as many as you can think of.

- |          |         |        |         |           |         |
|----------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|
| 1. aisle | 3. by   | 5. do  | 7. meet | 9. rain   | 11. tea |
| 2. burro | 4. cent | 6. hew | 8. peak | 10. sight | 12. you |

## ANTONYMS

Synonyms are words that share the same meaning, but **antonyms** are words of opposite sense, like *good/bad*, *up/down*, *black/white*. There are, however, many different kinds of opposition, so most words have several antonyms, not just one. Several oppositions result when words contrast with respect to only one part of their meaning. The word *man*, for example, has the sense 'adult, male, human being' with three semantic features. Each of those semantic features has its own opposite. Thus *man* is opposed to *boy* in age, to *woman* in sex, and to *beast* in species. Indeed, we are led to recognize semantic features in the first place precisely because of such oppositions.

Even when we compare whole senses, there are two kinds of opposition that are important for clear thinking, namely, a word's **contrary** and its **contradictory**. Contradictories are opposite terms that between them exhaust all the possibilities. Contraries are opposite terms that leave room for still other alternatives. The contradictory of *American* is *non-American*, but there are many contraries: *British*, *Spanish*, *German*, *French*, *Japanese*, and *Chinese*, to mention only a few. The contradictory of *white* is *nonwhite*; its extreme contrary is *black* but other contraries are *red*, *yellow*, *gray*, *pink*, *cream*, and *midnight blue*. The difference between contraries is often one of degree, so *midnight blue* is a greater contrary of *white* than is *cream*, and in some important ways *Chinese* is a greater contrary of *American* than is *British*.

Another difference between contradictories and contraries is in their logical truth. If we have a choice between contradictories, one of the choices must be logically true. A man is either an American or a non-American, and a color is either white or nonwhite. But in a choice between two contraries both may be false. A man need not be either an American or a Chinese, and a color does not have to be black or white.

English has many terms that come in sets of three. One term is positive, another is its contradictory, and the third its extreme contrary, for example: *believer/nonbeliever/disbeliever*. A nonbeliever is anyone who is passively op-

posed by not sharing the faith of the believer; he may never have had the faith preached to him, or he may have decided to withhold judgment, or he may have rejected the belief. A disbeliever, however, is only the latter; he is actively opposed to what the believer accepts. Agnostics are nonbelievers since they say human knowledge does not allow us to draw conclusions about God, whereas atheists are disbelievers who say what we know indicates there is none. Other such triplets are *moral/amoral/immoral*, *free/unfree/enslaved*, *productive/unproductive/destructive*, *essential/nonessential/irrelevant*, *rational/nonrational/irrational*, *popular/nonpopular/unpopular*. There is no clear pattern in the formation of these words, but *non-* and *un-* usually, although not always, mean simply 'not.'

One of the uses of antonyms is to help us recognize different senses in the multiple meanings of a word. They are useful in this way because each sense has its own peculiar antonyms not shared by other senses. The opposite of high mountains are low ones, but the opposite of high crimes are petty ones, and the opposite of a man who is high is one who is sober. There are at least three different senses of *high*, as revealed by its antonyms.

One way to arrive at antonyms is to think of alternatives like "Is this bread fresh or \_\_\_\_\_?" The appropriate antonym is clearly *stale*. *Fresh*, however, is a word of many meanings, some of which can be recognized by their various antonyms: Water is fresh or salt; recruits are fresh or experienced; a child is fresh or respectful; peas are fresh or canned, frozen or dried; a shirt is fresh or rumpled. Whenever two uses of a word have different antonyms, you can be sure different senses are involved.

Occasionally there are senses for which the language has never evolved an antonym. To be sure, we can always express an opposite idea in one way or another; but if there is no handy antonymic term, the result may be awkward. *Free* is a word of many senses, most of which have antonyms. Thus we can ask "Are the workers free or enslaved?" "Is the doctor free or busy?" and "Is the translation free or literal?" But when we come to the sense 'without charge,' there is no convenient antonym, so we are forced to ask something like "Are the tickets free or . . . do you have to pay for them?" In spite of the fact that English is supposed to be a capitalistic language, we have no ready way of saying in a single adjective that something has to be paid for. The lack of an antonym for *free* is all the more surprising in view of the abundance of synonyms like *gratuitous*, *gratis*, *complimentary*, and *costless*. Words like *costly*, *expensive*, *dear*, which look at first glance as though they might be opposites of *free*, turn out instead to be antonyms of *cheap*, *inexpensive*, *reasonable*. English has adjectives for saying that an object costs nothing, or a little, or a lot, but not merely that it costs something. The fact, however, should not be used to draw far-reaching conclusions about the English soul.

## Exercises

24. Give an antonym for each italicized word.

1. The airport scales showed our suitcases were *light*.
2. Ogden Nash writes amusing *light* verse.
3. Her dress was *light* blue.
4. The egg carton was *full*.
5. He had a *full* view of the spectacle.
6. The tide is *full* tonight.
7. The moon is *full* tonight.
8. She has a *full* face and figure.
9. He is *full* of facts about the Crimean War.
10. She was wearing a long, *full* evening dress.

25. For each of the following groups tell which word is the simple negation (contradictory) of the leftmost word and which is another kind of opposite (contrary).

1. social, antisocial, nonsocial
2. sterilized, infected, unsterilized
3. popular, nonpopular, unpopular
4. qualified, unqualified, disqualified
5. commissioned, noncommissioned, uncommissioned

## CHANGES OF MEANING

Meaning can change along all its dimensions and does so continuously. The main dimension, the sense of a word, changes in any of three ways. It can expand so that it is applied to more things than before. It can contract so that it takes in fewer things. Or it can shift its meaning altogether, so that it is used to name a completely different sort of thing.

When a sense expands, the change is called **generalization** because the word has become wider in its range of application. Thus *lady* was once quite limited; it meant the female head of a great house, wife of a lord. But its meaning began to expand, and as it did so it was applied to an increasingly large number of women. It came to mean a woman of the upper classes, then any woman of gentle behavior. Now the term is used of sales ladies, cleaning ladies, and lady marines. In popular use it has come to be no more than a synonym for *woman* and thus has become far more general than it was originally.

The opposite kind of change, in which a word's sense contracts, is called



**specialization.** The range of meaning narrows so that the word is applied to fewer things. *Deer* once meant any 'wild creature' and could then be applied to rats and mice as well as to stags and does. Now the sense has been specialized to refer to only one family of wild animals.

In a shift of meaning, the new sense and the old sense do not overlap. Since they do not refer to the same things at all, we cannot say that the meaning has either grown or shrunk, but only that it has undergone **semantic transfer**.

Metaphor is a transfer in which one sense suggests another. Tigers are fierce, powerful beasts, so a man who is also fierce, powerful, or otherwise suggestive of animal vitality can be called a tiger. The old meaning of *tiger* did not expand until it took in both tigers and men and a number of other creatures in between; rather there was a semantic leap producing a new meaning alongside the old one, thus giving *tiger* two senses instead of one. In much the same way *sloth* acquired two meanings. It first meant 'slowness, laziness'; in fact the word was derived by adding *-th* to *slow*, just as *truth* was from *true* and *growth* from *grow*. Then the word was transferred to an animal that seemed particularly slothful, and so a new sense came into existence.

It may be the linguistic context of a word rather than its original sense that motivates a transfer of meaning. The word *tide* once meant 'time,' a meaning we still preserve in *Christmastide* and *eventide*. It was thus used to refer to the times when the ocean was high or low, and because it occurred often in expressions like "the tides of the sea," "flood tide," and "ebb tide," it underwent a transfer, coming to mean the rise and fall of the water itself. Today the old meaning has completely died out except in a few petrified phrases, and in some of them the word is usually misunderstood. If anyone who uses the cliché "Time and tide wait for no man" thinks about the meaning of the individual words, he probably makes associations with the inexorable rise and fall of the sea, an image which is both picturesque and appropriate to the whole meaning of the saying. The older sense of the expression, however, could be better rendered in current English as "Time and occasion wait for no man," which is certainly more prosaic than the misunderstanding.

The sound of a word can also suggest a new meaning and thus precipitate a transfer. *Buxom* originally meant 'obedient,' a buxom maid thus being a compliant one. The pronunciation of the word, however, seems to echo words like *bosom*, *bust*, and *breast*; as a result nowadays a blonde can be buxom and yet unyielding. The new sense of the word, 'full-bosomed,' is scarcely related in meaning to the older one, but results from the accidental similarity of sound, known as **clang association**, from German *Klang* 'sound.'

Sometimes English speakers imagine that two words are connected by a transfer of meaning when actually they are quite unrelated. The result is known as **folk etymology**. An *ear* of corn and the *ear* we hear with, as we noted earlier, have nothing to do with each other. They were originally

different words with different pronunciations, but time has brought their sounds together so that many people suppose the former word to be a shifted sense of the latter. The word *saw* meaning 'a maxim, proverb' is connected historically with the verb *say*; it has nothing to do with a carpenter's *saw*. But on page 210 of this chapter there was a phrase ". . . the old saw about one picture being worth a thousand words still cuts straight to the heart of things," which implied a metaphorical connection between the two *saws*. If you read the sentence without noticing anything strange about it, you were an unconscious collaborator in the invention of an etymology.

Folk etymology can also react on the pronunciation of a word.<sup>17</sup> Once speakers think of two meanings as connected by a transfer (though wrongly so), they may modify one of the words in the direction of the other. Normally the rarer word will be repronounced to make it more like the familiar one. Thus, when the first Englishmen settled in America, they heard the Indians calling one of the local wild creatures *musquash*. Since the creature was a rodent and had a musky smell about him and since *musquash* meant nothing to the English but did sound a bit like *muskrat*, that is what they called the beast. Such phonemic remodeling is not limited to strange foreign words. English used to have a number of synonyms for *man* that we have since lost, including *gome*. One use of that term, which did survive, was in the expression *bride-gome*, a man about to take a bride. *Gome* was, however, changed to *groom* because of the similarity in sound and because people began to think of it as a transferred use of the latter word meaning 'servant, stableboy, lad.'

Folk etymologizing still goes on. Almost everyone has had the experience of discovering that a word which suggested certain meanings to him is really quite unrelated to its supposed origin. An advertisement offers for sale "tri-kini bathing suits," which are three piece versions of the bikini, named under the erroneous assumption that *bikini* starts with the same element as *bicycle*. A four-year-old, hearing talk of the Civil War, misinterprets it as Silver War and asks when the Gold War was. Princess Maria of the Gypsies insists that her people are properly called Romans (actually, Romany from the Gypsy word *rom* 'man') and when asked why replies, "Because we roam from one place to another."

In addition to changes in its sense, a word may also change its associations as a consequence of being used in new environments. Changes in emotional associations are the most striking and important. They are of two kinds: **amelioration**, the process of getting better, and **pejoration**, the process of getting worse. The former can be thought of as a rise on the scale of value and the latter as a fall. English once had two words that were more or less synonymous, both meaning 'boy': *cniht* and *cnafa*. The first became the word *knight* and the second the word *knave*. Although they began at about the same place on the scale of value, they developed in opposite directions. Other

<sup>17</sup> Compare the discussion of metanalysis in Chapter 4.

words that have sunk on the scale are *sanctimonious*, once meaning 'saintly' now 'hypocritically holy,' and *harlot*, which used to mean 'fellow' or 'rascal' in a bantering way and was applied to men. Words that have improved in value are *prize*, earlier meaning 'price,' and *luxury*, now usually considered a desirable condition, but earlier 'extravagant excess' or 'lechery.' In the Middle Ages, *luxury* was the name regularly used for the seventh of the deadly sins, now called lust.

The sound of a word can also be an influence on its emotional associations. One common table fish, the mullet, has a name of such unpleasant sound that prospective mullet-eaters are turned against it. Or at least restaurant owners think so; they have begun calling the fish by its more elegant Spanish name, *lisa*.

The emotional value of words sometimes fluctuates greatly, as can be seen from the history of synonyms for the word *negro*. When the NAACP was founded, the preferred term was *colored person*, but it along with *negro* has recently been rejected in favor of *black* or *Afro-American*. The word *black* was used as an adjective to describe negro skin color as early as the year 890, but the oldest noun is probably *bloman*, a word used from the early 1200's, now obsolete. It is a compound of *man* and the color term *blo* meaning 'blackish blue, leaden-colored.' In the sixteenth century a variety of terms came into use including *black Moor* or *blackamoor*, *Ethiopian*, and a set of words with four main forms, *negro*, *nigro*, *neger*, and *nig(g)er*. In their early use the various *negro* forms did not differ from one another in emotional association as they do today, all being fairly neutral then. They are loan words from several European languages in which they mean 'black,' the differences between them being due to the influence of one language or another. Forms with final *o* derive from Spanish or Portuguese *negro*; forms with final *r* are due to French *negre* or Latin *niger*. Forms with *e* as the first vowel derive from Spanish, Portuguese, or French; forms with *i* have been influenced by Latin. The word is usually capitalized nowadays by analogy with *Caucasian* and *Mongolian*, whose capitals are due to the fact that they are derived from place names. In the seventeenth century *colored* began to be used as an adjective to describe the Negro, and *black* first appeared as a noun, translating the Hispano-Gallo-Latin *negro*-words. It was not until 1890 that *Afro-American* made its appearance.

In current use the various synonyms for *negro* certainly differ in their emotional value, but the preference sometimes expressed for *black* on the grounds that the other terms are "white man's words" misses the point that they are no more so than *black* itself. Moreover, it is not who has used a word, but in what contexts and with what pride it is used, that determines its emotional value. Any synonym can undergo amelioration or pejoration, depending on how it is used, so a campaign merely to substitute one word for another is pointless.

As was mentioned earlier, there are associational scales other than the

good/bad one along which meaning can change. For instance, there is the scale of **potency** or **intensity**. *Twit* originally meant 'accuse, reproach'; its present sense, hardly more than 'tease about a fault,' represents a considerable decline on the potency scale. A more complex example is *lust*, formerly meaning a simple and moderate 'pleasure.' *Lust* went down on the scale of value at the same time that it rose sharply on the intensity scale. Whenever we exaggerate in our use of language we are forcing the exaggerated word down on the scale of potency, because we are using an originally strong meaning in a relatively weak context. The semantic history of intensifying words like *very*, *extremely*, *absolutely*, *terribly*, and *awfully* illustrates the process. When someone says, "I'm awfully glad," there is no hint of the older sense 'inspiring awe or dread.' When a newspaper columnist writes about "flowered, psychedelic-type decorated shirts and pants that were literally eye-popping," *literally* has lost so much force that it has come to mean the same as its putative antonym *metaphorically*. The literal sense of "eye-popping" is 'applying such pressure as to explode the eyeball from the skull'; its metaphorical sense is 'surprising,' presumably what the writer had in mind.

The grammatical function of a word can also be changed simply by using it as a new part of speech, although there is often some accompanying shift in the word's sense. Thus we turn the verb *wait* into a noun, the noun *fun* into an adjective, the adjective *near* into a preposition, the preposition *to* into an adverb, and the adverb *down* into a verb. The single word *out* has been so changed that now it functions as an adverb in *They went out*, a preposition in *Look out the window*, an adjective in *He wears an out size*, a noun in *They want an out*, a verb in *Murder will out*, an interjection in *Out!* and a combining form in *She outfoxed him*.

**Functional shift** is very common in present-day English. When a master of ceremonies bids goodnight to a visitor with the words "Thank you so much for guesting with us," he has shifted the function of *guest* from a noun to a verb meaning 'be a guest.' He is, however, by no means the first to do so. As early as 1615 Chapman in his translation of the *Odyssey* used the word in the same way: "Tell me, best of princes, who he was that guested here so late." The noun had been shifted to a transitive sense 'to receive or treat someone as a guest' even earlier. Still *to guest* is not a particularly common verb nowadays, whereas the complementary term *to host* is rife, especially on television. Consequently it is likely that the current use is guided more by analogy than by Chapman or his successors. If a host hosts, then presumably a guest guests. It is as simple as that. A new meaning is not necessarily invented once only.

Changes in grammatical function abound in newspaper language. Here are a few:

Students in a technical high school "*background* their practical shop training with courses in science, mathematics and drafting."

“The annual chicken *broil* this afternoon and a threshing bee Saturday are highlighting Manchester’s Centennial observance.”

A movie review complains that the director “has underlined everything, *nuanced* nothing.”

Even phrases can be given a new function, witness the well-known *has-been* as a *for-instance*.

A special change in function is **commonization**—the use of a proper name as a common noun or other part of speech. Thus, *to shanghai* is an action named after the city in China where an unwary sailor might find himself. *Silhouette* derives from Étienne de Silhouette, an eighteenth-century French government official, so notorious for his economics that it seemed fitting to name after him a portrait that is only the shadow of a picture. Trade names for highly successful products are also subject to common use as generic terms. *Scotch Tape* and *Band-Aid* are familiar examples, but not many people realize that *zipper*, *escalator*, and *ping-pong* were also originally trademarks.

Such change in the function of words has been going on for a long time in English. When a word is first used as a new part of speech, it is likely to seem uncouth, like *contact* used as a verb or *think* used as an adjective as in “We have to contact the think tank,” and there is always a chance that those who so use a word are themselves uncouth. But as time passes, more speakers adopt the new use, making it seem less outlandish. Finally a day comes when the new use is just as normal as the old one, and most people no longer are conscious of which is which.

The examples we have been looking at are in various stages of the process of functional shift. Some, just beginning, will stop and return to their original use. Others, having run the course, can be freely used as various parts of speech. On the whole, English favors change of function, so we can expect a good deal more of it.

Finally words change in scope, in any of the several directions mentioned earlier. Such changes are often called **dialect borrowing** rather than **semantic change**, which is applied mainly to alteration of sense and association. We will discuss change in scope only briefly, citing a few examples.

A word restricted to one geographical dialect may spread to other regions. Thus American *OK* is now to be found in all parts of the English-speaking world—and even in foreign languages. So also British *posh* is widely known in the United States. An old word can be revived, thus bridging the gap between historical dialects—for example, *handbook*, which was used in the Middle Ages and then replaced by a Latin loan-word *manual*, only to be revived in the nineteenth century under the influence of the similar German *Handbuch*. A word limited to some social dialect may be taken up by other groups. In the early eighteenth century *mob* was self-consciously sophisticated slang used by the haut monde; now it has no social connotations. The verb *bust* was once a vulgar form of *burst* but has developed independent senses



and moved into the standard language. A word like *albeit* may become largely restricted to writing; or a word known primarily in its printed form may begin to be used in speech—often with some change in pronunciation, for instance *impasse*, pronounced by a certain mellifluous senator in three syllables *im-pass-say* presumably because of a spelling similarity with *passé*.

A word once quite informal like *phone* for *telephone* may move into increasingly formal situations, or a relatively formal word like *convention* can become as informal as the American Legion and the Shriners make it. Words restricted to some special situation may spread into general use, there flourishing like a green bay tree. Thus technical language is forever being popularized, often with a change of sense in the process. The psychological term *inferiority complex* denotes 'a neurotic state resulting from repressed fear of personal incompetence that often manifests itself in aggressive behavior'; in its popular extension, however, the term usually means no more than 'shyness.' *Complex* itself is much used by the psychologically hip layman, with no more precise meaning than 'something on the mind.' The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung invented the words *extrovert* and *introvert* as technical terms; today they are loosely used to mean 'gregarious' and 'reserved.' The term *drive* was used to denote 'a strong instinctual motivating force, such as the sex drive or the drive for food'; but in popular use it often means no more than 'initiative.' Psychology is by no means the only specialized area from which words have entered the general vocabulary, often undergoing subtle or gross alterations of sense in the process. But this field is typical and is more productive of such loans than other specialized areas, partly because its subject matter is of greater interest to most of us than astronomy, hydraulic engineering, or falconry. Any specialized jargon can make a contribution, however, for there is continuing interchange among all varieties of English.

Change of meaning is rarely a simple matter. Change of sense, association, function, and scope all interact, one triggering the other in a process that is complex because the kinds of meaning influence one another. Furthermore it never stops. Language change is a continuous process of adjustment between us who use language and the situations in which we use it. Language is no static marble frieze, but a dynamic, evolving kaleidoscope.

## Exercises

26. Has the sense of each of the following words changed by generalization, specialization, or transfer? Compare the present meaning with the etymology of the word or with obsolete and archaic meanings shown in a dictionary.

- |            |          |               |          |         |
|------------|----------|---------------|----------|---------|
| 1. butcher | 3. lousy | 5. manuscript | 7. tease | 9. wade |
| 2. corpse  | 4. mail  | 6. quarantine | 8. zest  | 10. wed |



27. Each of the following words has been influenced in form by another word with which it came to be associated in meaning (folk etymology). Look up the etymology in a dictionary and describe what changes have taken place.

- |           |                     |                  |            |
|-----------|---------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1. belfry | 3. forlorn hope     | 5. Jordan almond | 7. sirloin |
| 2. cutlet | 4. high-muck-a-muck | 6. shamefaced    | 8. mohair  |

28. The italicized words are now often thought to contain meanings that are not actually a part of their history. Answer the questions after you have looked up the etymology of the words in a dictionary.

1. Was a *pantry* so called because it held pans?
2. Is *starboard* the side of the ship from which you watch stars?
3. Is a *walnut* called that because it grows by a wall?
4. Were *nightmares* originally dreams about horses?

29. The following words show how a four-year-old child changed pronunciation through folk etymology. Describe the changes. If you can, give some similar examples from your own experience.

- |                                |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. bazooka (bazooka)           | 3. wheelbarrel (wheelbarrow) |
| 2. handkerchief (handkerchief) | 4. overalls (overalls)       |

30. Has the emotional association of each of the following words undergone amelioration or pejoration? Look in a dictionary for the earlier meanings.

- |           |          |           |            |            |
|-----------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1. crafty | 3. fond  | 5. inmate | 7. shrewd  | 9. vulgar  |
| 2. dizzy  | 4. hussy | 6. pretty | 8. villain | 10. zealot |

31. The following words have all weakened in the intensity of their meaning. What was the original sense of each according to the dictionary?

- |         |         |          |               |         |
|---------|---------|----------|---------------|---------|
| 1. fret | 2. soon | 3. spill | 4. tremendous | 5. very |
|---------|---------|----------|---------------|---------|

32. Use each of the following words in sentences in as many different parts of speech as you can.

- |         |           |         |          |          |
|---------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| 1. back | 2. better | 3. near | 4. round | 5. wrong |
|---------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|

33. What proper name lies behind each of the following?

- |              |                   |             |                |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. badminton | 4. dunce          | 7. sandwich | 10. pants      |
| 2. sideburns | 5. graham cracker | 8. maverick | 11. cantaloupe |
| 3. meander   | 6. teddy bear     | 9. jug      | 12. mesmerize  |

# 7

## THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE

In preceding chapters we have looked at several aspects of language: its sounds, vocabulary, grammar, and meanings. But language also has a purpose—or rather a variety of purposes—it can serve, to which Chapters 7 and 8 will be directed. In one way of looking at the matter, language has as many different purposes as there are occasions for using it. That infinite number of uses can, however, be reduced to a short list of basic functions that combine variously in our modes of discourse.

### THE BASIC FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Any effort to simplify our complex use of language by reducing its infinite variety to a few basic functions must be somewhat arbitrary. Neat little lists are always to be distrusted. Yet they are convenient and do no great harm as long as everyone remembers that the limits they impose are artificial. For convenience, then, we will say that language has seven basic functions: informative, interrogative, expressive, evocative, performatory, directive, and phatic.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Other discussions of the functions of language are to be found in Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York, 1958); Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); Charles W. Morris, *Signs, Language, and Behavior*, (New York, 1955); I. A. Richards, *Speculative Instruments* (Chicago, 1955); and Philip E. Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington, Ind., 1968).

The **informative** function of language is the one we often think of as its main purpose. It is language used to tell what the speaker believes, to give information about things, and to reason about facts. It is language concerned with what we know—that is, with cognition—and thus it is the use to which language is most often put in all branches of learning. An informative statement is one that purports to be about matters of fact by asserting that something is or is not the case. Consequently it must be the kind of statement that can be either true or false—for instance, *Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit*, *Forty-eight percent of all Americans live in igloos*, and *Cleopatra was bitten by an asp*. Of course, informative language need not be true—the information can be wrong—but it must be the sort of statement about which you can ask, “Is that true?” It makes no sense to ask of a question like *Who is he?* or of a direction like *Pass the salt* or of an exclamation like *Damn!* whether it is true or not. Such sentences are neither true nor false, but just are. Indeed, the only sort of statement to which truth and falsity are relevant is the informative utterance.

If the purpose of informative language is to give information, the aim of **interrogative** language is to get it. Because it includes all questions that need answers, such as *What time is class over?* *Who’s that?* and *How do you find the square root of 3.14?* it is language used to find out what the hearer knows or believes. Both informative and interrogative language are about cognition; but the first focuses on what the speaker knows and the second on what the hearer knows. Thus they are complementary functions, the first of several such pairs.

However important giving information may be, there are other respectable uses of language, for example, its **expressive** function, which is the use of words to reveal something about the feelings and attitudes of the speaker. At its simplest, expressive language consists of ejaculations like *ouch*, *good heavens*, *damn*, and *wow*. Such forms tell how the speaker feels, but not what he is feeling that way about. Of course, expressive words are very often added to other kinds of language to make the same sentence serve two functions at once. The difference between *The car won’t start* and *The stupid car won’t start* is that the first sentence tells only about the car, whereas the second tells in addition how the speaker feels about the situation. Swearing is expressive, but so are words like *glorious*, *beautiful*, *excellent*, and *good*. We can, after all, express ourselves either favorably or unfavorably.

As the preceding chapter has shown, words often combine literal sense and emotional values and thus may differ from one another not in what they name but in what feelings they suggest—a distinction that is all-important in expressive language. For example, the difference between *Here come the police* and *Here come the fuzz* is not in the things the sentences are about but in the judgments expressed about those things. While informative language makes statements about what is or is not true, expressive language

passes judgment on whether it is good or bad. It evaluates, appraises, and asserts the speaker's feelings.

Evocative language, on the other hand, tries to create feelings in the hearer. Its aim is to amuse, startle, anger, soothe, worry, or please. It is an important part of jokes, of tragedies, of advertising, and of propaganda. It is the language of a mother comforting her child, of a demagogue haranguing the crowd, and of a young man wooing a girl. Obviously, expressive and evocative language often go hand in hand—if you express your feelings about a political candidate by calling him either a slack-jawed idiot or a stalwart patriot, you probably hope to evoke the same feelings in someone else—but the difference between the two kinds of language is clear. Sometimes it may suit a man's purposes for others to have feelings he does not share. So he may want his neighbors to feel that the gubernatorial candidate of his political party is a stalwart patriot, even though he is privately convinced the fellow is a slack-jawed idiot. Language that tries to evoke a feeling the speaker does not share is often propaganda. But the evocative function, as we shall see, is also dominant in literature.

Similar in purpose to evocative use is **directive** language. It gives orders. Evocative language tries to make the hearer feel something; directive language tries to make him do something. Since it is often easier to lead a horse to water if you can first get him to feel thirsty, these two functions may go together. Clearly the chief reason for wanting people to feel that some candidate is a patriot rather than an idiot is that they will vote for him. Directive language, however, need not be mixed with feelings. The simplest directions are requests like *Pass the salt* or *Have a seat*, which are typically quite neutral in feeling. Though directions can be given in a variety of ways, the imperative sentence is the structure most characteristic of them. However, any verbal effort, such as statements with *ought* and *must*, to control what others do, falls into the category of directive language.

A semantically odd kind of language is that known as **performatory**. Whereas directive language aims at causing an action, the function of a performatory statement is simply to be the action that it states. This seeming paradox can be illustrated more easily than it can be explained. When the defendant at a trial says, "I plead not guilty," that very statement is the act of so pleading. The defendant is not talking about any past or future pleading or about any other action that he is doing at the same time. The statement itself is the performance of the action mentioned in it. It is this characteristic of self-reference that makes performatory utterances odd. Yet they are common enough, for example *I swear to tell the truth, I name this ship H.M.S. Pinafore, I promise to love, honor, and obey, I bet you ten dollars, I declare the meeting adjourned*, and many other formulas of the same sort.

Whereas the typical sentence pattern for directive utterances is the imperative, with an actual or implied subject *you*, the typical pattern for perform-

atory statements has *I* as its subject. Like informative and expressive language, performatory focuses on the speaker, while interrogative, evocative, and directive all focus on the hearer. Thus the foregoing six uses of language form a balanced set, differing from one another in their focus and in their reference, whether to what is known, what is felt, or what is done:

|                        | FOCUS ON     |               |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| REFERENCE TO           | Speaker      | Hearer        |
| Cognition,<br>knowing  | Informative  | Interrogative |
| Evaluation,<br>feeling | Expressive   | Evocative     |
| Action,<br>doing       | Performatory | Directive     |

The last use of language we will be concerned with is one that is easy to overlook, yet it is exceedingly common. **Phatic** language includes the everyday small talk that we use to establish rapport, make contact with our fellows, and assure mutual good will. Greetings, farewells, much chitchat, and most ritual language serve this function, for example *hello, goodbye, nice day, How are you,* and *We had a lovely time—thank you for asking us.* When someone casually says “How are you?” you know he is not really asking about your state of health. One of the most deadly bores in the world is the man who responds to that question with a detailed account of his neuralgia or his coming appendectomy when the only appropriate answer is one like “Fine” or “Not bad, how about you?” Similarly, when we say on leaving a party that we have had a nice time, we are not in fact saying anything about the party, which may well have been insufferably dull. Our words mean simply that we are leaving. Much social language is insincere if taken literally, but to chide it for its insincerity is to miss the point. It is not literal language, and its function is not to give information. It rather serves to establish an atmosphere in which people can deal easily with one another. So utterly devoid of content is it, that some have wondered whether phatic expressions should be considered true language at all. They are more like verbal handshakes.

The term *phatic* comes from a Greek word that means ‘talking,’ but though

phatic language is “just talk,” it need not be informal or inconsequential. When a group sings the national anthem or recites a church creed, rapport is established among its members in a sober and ceremonious way. Those who flout such solemn exercises have in the past been burnt at the stake and may still be investigated by a militant society of patriots. It is by such phatic language that we decide who is safe because he is “one of us,” whether in the neighborhood or the nation, and when we have phatic rapport with one another we can truthfully say, “We speak the same language.”

Although there may be more, seven basic functions of language have been suggested above. These functions will, however, often overlap in a single utterance, as when a drowning man calls “Help!” He gives the information that he is in trouble, expresses a feeling of distress, evokes a feeling of urgency in anyone who hears him, and finally directs anyone in earshot to pull him out of the water. To be sure, the drowning man can hardly be said to formulate all or any of those purposes; if he did, he would likely sink to a watery grave before he could get the word *help* out of his mouth. But that all those functions are served by the one word seems obvious, and the drowning man, having been rescued and given opportunity for calmer reflection, would probably agree. Because many sentences fill more than one function simultaneously, no simple pigeonholing is possible for them.

Although some functions and sentence forms seem to go naturally together, such as the directive function and the imperative, the form of a sentence is often not a reliable guide to its use. For example, the following all look like questions: *Will alcohol freeze? Will you pass the salt? Will winter never end? Won't you be nice to a poor old helpless woman? Would you help me if you were in my shoes?* Yet, although all have the question form, they are not all used to get information. In fact, only the first sentence is likely to have a genuine interrogative function. It is the only one that looks for an informative answer. The second is really a direction; anyone who pretends that it is a question and answers “Yes” instead of passing the salt has a boorish sense of humor. Similarly, the third is an expression of emotion, the fourth an effort to evoke pity, and the last a roundabout way of giving some information—namely, “I am not going to help you.” Thus, in deciding what use a sentence is put to, we must look not only at its form but at the whole situation of the speaker and hearer. And we must be prepared to distinguish in a single utterance overlapping uses.

The uses of language can overlap unpredictably, but they also combine systematically in various **modes of discourse**. For example, there is **normative discourse**, including laws, moral codes, books of etiquette, prescriptive grammars, and all statements of what ought to be; it expresses values, directs action, and gives reasons in support of its rules. There is **ritual discourse**, including church services, commencement ceremonies, judicial procedures, and other set forms of expression that serve to establish phatic communion



among the participants in the ritual, to evoke socially desirable feelings, and often to perform certain actions like marrying, awarding degrees, and pronouncing judgments. Of other possible modes, but two will be mentioned here. One, to be treated more fully in the next chapter, is **logical discourse**, concerned with asking and answering questions about factual matters and with drawing conclusions from them. The other is **literary discourse**, language that claims our attention because of the pleasure given by the way it is expressed.

### Exercise

1. What single use (informative, interrogative, expressive, evocative, directive, performatory, or phatic) does each of the following sentences most clearly have?
  1. The kumquat, imported from China, is grown mainly for its fruit.
  2. I certainly would like one of those kumquats you've got.
  3. Now don't be afraid to stop me if you've heard this story before.
  4. Let me just tell you what imbecility those cretins over in the administration building have dreamt up now.
  5. What's the date today?
  6. I now pronounce you man and wife.
  7. The minister said to Dudley and Priscilla, "I now pronounce you man and wife."
  8. Water consists of two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen.
  9. Are you going to let the bureaucrats in Washington dictate where you can live and tell you what you can and can't do with your own property?
  10. Did you know that it is raining?

### LITERARY DISCOURSE

What is literature? That is, what do we mean by saying that some language is literary while other language, such as that of science and logic, is not? It is sometimes suggested that literature is language with a high emotive charge. While that is true of much literature, especially poetry, non-literary discourse can also arouse emotions. A description of industrial pollution, of the dangers of uncontrolled use of DDT, or of the results of atomic warfare may be highly emotive in both intention and effect, and yet not be what

we would want to call literature. It is also proposed sometimes that literature is language whose suggestions and associations are extraordinarily rich. Ezra Pound had something of the sort in mind when he wrote that "great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree." But Pound was talking about what makes literature great—not what makes it literature. Some literary small potatoes may be undercharged with meaning and yet remain literature. Sometimes literary discourse is identified with fiction, as opposed to scientific discourse, which is devoted to fact. Rather than a report of what is, fiction is an imitation of what might be—an account of imagined events. However, there are some factual accounts, such as histories, biographies, and essays, that seem to be literary though factual; so it is probably better to say that fiction is just one species of literature.

The Roman poet Horace spoke of poetry—and his remarks are applicable to all literature—as being intended either to profit or to please the reader, though the best writing should be both useful because it teaches and delightful because it entertains. What is essential in the Horatian definition is the delight. A work that delights its reader without teaching him anything useful may be frivolous literature, but it is literature nonetheless. A work that teaches without giving pleasure is, however, merely a textbook. Literature may incidentally be informative or directive—that is, it may teach or move to action, as novels of social protest are intended to do—but its characteristic function is the evocative one, specifically to call forth feelings of pleasure.

Literature, then, is language that pleases, but pleases in a special way. A telegram announcing that you have won the Irish Sweepstakes may be delightful, but it is not literature. The pleasure that literature gives comes not from the message, content, or meaning, but from the way it is expressed. Language becomes literature when it is valued for its form apart from its message, when it is thought to be good for its own sake, when people read it just for the sake of reading it. Archibald MacLeish ended a poem called "Ars Poetica" with the sentence "A poem should not mean / But be." When our attention is directed to what language means, we are looking away from language to something outside it. In literature, on the other hand, attention is focused on the act of language itself. This is not to say that subject matter has no part whatever in literature, because some of the pleasure we get is due to the skillful way form embodies meaning. When an author's literary style—the way he uses sound patterns, words, and grammatical structures—is exactly appropriate to the thing he has to say, the reader takes delight in the skillful match. Even so, it is not the message that makes literature, but the play of language that gives it form.

It might even be said that literature is language in which the impulse to play is dominant. We must not, however, think of play as something that is merely childish and inconsequential. It is as important a part of our human nature as more sober kinds of behavior. Mankind is not just *homo sapiens*,

man the knower; we are also *homo ludens*, man the player. In its simplest forms, the playful use of language is of small moment, whether it be a tongue-twister from children's lore like "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" or a play on words like Alexander Woollcott's bon mot "I must get out of these wet clothes and into a dry martini." In more complex forms, however, it becomes the poetry of Chaucer, the plays of Shakespeare, the epics of Milton, and the great English novels. The difference between the most rudimentary juggling with sounds or linguistic joking and the classic works of literature, by which we judge all other literary works, is one of degree and relative value, not one of kind. All are literature because their language can be valued for what it is rather than what it means.

### Exercise

2. What characteristics, if any, of each passage mark it as literature?

1. Thirty days hath September,  
April, June, and November;  
All the rest have thirty-one,  
Save the second month alone.

2. There was an old fellow of Lyme,  
Who married three wives at a time.  
When asked, "Why the third?"  
He replied, "One's absurd,  
And bigamy, sir, is a crime."

3. Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

William Blake, *Songs of Experience*

4. Population, again, and bodily health and vigour, are things which are nowhere treated in such an unintelligent, misleading, exaggerated way as in England. Both are really machinery; yet how many people all around us do we see rest in them and fail to look beyond them! Why, one has heard people . . . who would talk of our large English families in quite a solemn strain, as if they had something in itself beautiful, elevating, and meritorious in them; as if the British Philistine would have only to present himself before the Great Judge with his twelve children, in order to be received among the sheep as a matter of right!

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*

5. The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings.

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*

6. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.

William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Address"

## SOUND PATTERNS

Now we turn to some of the ways language gives the sort of pleasure that makes literature of it. None of these devices are limited to what we ordinarily think of as literature—poems, plays, novels, short stories, and so forth. But even when used in humbler forms of communication they represent an interest in the form of the language, which is the stuff of literature.

First we will consider the play of sound that is especially characteristic of poetry, although in diluted forms it may be found also in prose. In all of the following discussion it must be kept in mind that sounds have no inherent beauty. As we saw in Chapter 1, German "guttural" sounds are no uglier than the "musical" sounds of Italian, and the vowel of *father* is no more esthetic than that of *gather*. Often when we think we are responding to the esthetic value of sounds, we are actually reacting to word meanings or associations. Thus the opening line "Go, lovely Rose" of a poem by Edmund Waller may be said to derive its beauty from the balanced *o* and *l* sounds, but it is doubtful that a similar balance in "Glow, lovely Nose" would strike anyone as particularly elegant. Or if a writer wanted to use the name *Selledore* for an imaginary island in the South Pacific, he might say he had done so because the sounds of the name suggest the exotic and mysterious East; yet essentially the same sounds in *cellar-door* seem common enough. It is easy to fool ourselves into believing that we are appreciating the musical value of a sound when in fact we are responding to meaning and context.

In spite of the foregoing caveat, however, it is true that some sounds, or rather sound combinations, suggest meanings or are otherwise appropriate to their sense. In Chapter 4 it was suggested that words like *burp*, *snap*, *crackle*, *bang*, and *boom* are iconic signs in which pronunciation fits meaning so well that we can say the sound echoes the sense. Such onomatopoeia is not limited to words, but can stretch over whole phrases, as in the following often cited lines from Tennyson's poem "The Princess":

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees.

In these lines a soft, buzzing effect is created partly by the repeated *m* and *n* sounds and partly by the fact that every sound in the two lines is voiced—pronounced with an actual buzz of the vocal cords—whereas normally some voiceless sounds would break up an utterance of such length.

In addition to the direct imitation of noises by speech sounds, there are sets of words that share some combination of sounds and are also vaguely alike in meaning—for example, *swab*, *swag*, *swagger*, *swallow*, *swap*, *swarm*, *swash*, *swat*, *sway*, *sweep*, *swell*, *swift*, *swig*, *swill*, *swim*, *swing*, *swipe*, *swirl*, *swish*, *switch*, *swivel*, *swizzle*, *swoon*, *swoop*, and *swoosh*, most of which suggest a free-wheeling, arc-like movement that seems to be associated with the beginning *sw*-sound. Such words are phonologically symbolic, and the combination of sounds they share is called a **phonestheme**. Of course, a given combination will not always have symbolic meaning; *sw*- may not suggest movement in *sweet*. But once a phonestheme is established, it is available for use by poets to reinforce the meaning of their verses and to give that special pleasure that is the essence of literature. For example, in the following lines from "The Windhover" Gerard Manley Hopkins is describing the flight and glide of a bird:

. . . and striding

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and  
gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind.

From *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*  
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).  
Reprinted by permission.

The *sw*-phonestheme appears in *swing* and *sweeps* but is also echoed in the *s* of *striding*, *ecstasy*, *skate's*, and *smooth* and in the *w* of *wimpling*, *wing*, and *wind*.

If there is any doubt that sound symbolism is real and not just imaginary, like many notions about the beauty or ugliness of sounds, consider the two shapes below. One of them is called a *tikiriki* and the other an *oombooloo*.



Which is which should be clear to every reader. However difficult it may be to explain, there seems to be some connection between sounds and shapes, a connection moreover that runs through various other sense perceptions. Thus one of the names above is quick and active, the other slow and passive; one is brittle and crisp, the other soft and yielding; one gives off a loud, high pitch, the other a low, deep pitch; one is acrid, the other musky; one is tart, the other sweet. This interconnection of sense impressions is called *synesthesia*.

John Keats wrote a poem, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," in which he used two analogies to describe the excitement of discovering something entirely new:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
 When a new planet swims into his ken;  
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
 He stared at the Pacific—

Unfortunately for the literal truth of the second analogy—although literal truth is of no great importance to the passage—it was Balboa rather than Cortez who discovered the Pacific Ocean. Even if Keats had been aware of the historical fact, he might have chosen the name of Cortez because the lines about him imply strength, penetration, clarity, perseverance—all qualities that go better with the sound of *Cortez*, which is more tikiriki-like, than with the oombooloo-ish *Balboa*.

In addition to the use of sounds to suggest meaning, literary language sometimes plays with consonants and vowels by repeating them in various patterns. When the sounds come at the beginning of a word or syllable, the repetition is called **alliteration**. Alliteration can be found in our everyday use of language, especially in certain fixed expressions like *time and tide, bread and butter, lief or loath, kith and kin, black and blue, sweet and sour, waste not—want not*, and a good many others. It occurs also in literary prose, such as the opening of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," with its repeated *f, s, k*, and *n* sounds:

*F*ourscore and *s*even years ago our *f*athers brought *f*orth on this continent a *n*ew nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created *e*qual.

But, of course, the most common use of alliteration is in poetry. There it may also be more or less sporadic, as in Shakespeare's "Let *m*e not to the marriage of true *m*inds / Admit *i*mpediments," with its repeated *m*'s; or it can be used with more or less precise regularity, as it was in some earlier



forms of poetry such as the Old English battle poem "Maldon," in which an old warrior teaches his younger companions the meaning of heroism:

Brightwold declaimed,      his broad shield raised.  
 He was an old soldier.      The ashen spear shook.  
 He full gallantly      guided the troops:  
 "Courage must be the hardier,      heart the keener,  
 Mind must be the firmer,      as our might grows less."

When the repeated sounds come at the end of words, the device is called **rime**. Although there are several varieties of it, rime generally involves an identity of sound from the stressed vowel through the end of two words: *pause/cause, stew/new, latter/scatter*. When two words have spellings that suggest they should rime, but pronunciations that in fact do not, they are said to be instances of **eye-rime**: *move/dove, toe/shoe, laughter/daughter*. There is no common term for the reverse situation, in which words are true rimes although they are unlike in spelling, though it is common enough: *cough/off, who/grew, fashion/passion*. Orthographic jokes, however, sometimes take advantage of the disparity between sound and spelling by distorting the latter.

*Nietzsche is pietzsche,  
 But Russell has mussell.*

Although rime is extremely common in poetry, it is usually avoided in prose. The repetition of sound is likely to distract the hearer's attention from the meaning of the words. In prose, even literary prose, the sense of the language is so important that much distraction from it is thought to be a weakness. Yet prose rime is occasionally found, as in the "fourscore" with which the "Gettysburg Address" begins. Rimes also occur in many everyday expressions such as *willy-nilly, yoo-hoo, hurdy-gurdy, culture-vulture, even-steven, nitwit, wheeling and dealing*, and *hanky-panky*, although the effect is likely to be jocular. Rime is too playful for straightforward language.

If words have identical vowels followed by different consonants, the repetition is called **assonance**: for example, *wise/light* or the repeated *o* sounds in these lines from John Dryden's "Song for St. Cecilia's Day":

The soft complaining flute  
 In dying notes discovers  
 The woes of hopeless lovers

If different vowels are followed by the same consonant sounds, the repetition is **consonance**, as in the final lines of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Politics," where it appears in current standard pronunciation instead of rime:

When the Church is social *worth*,  
 When the statehouse is the *hearth*,  
 Then the perfect State is *come*,  
 The republican at *home*.

The latter sorts of repetition are both fairly common in everyday expressions. Assonance can be seen in *slow poke*, *eager beaver*, *glad rags*, and *lame brain*. Consonance is found in *fiddle-faddle*, *ding-dong*, *mishmash*, and *tip-top*.

## Exercises

3. How does sound echo sense in the following lines from Alexander Pope's "Essay on Criticism"?

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,  
 The sound must seem an echo to the sense:  
 Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows:  
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
 The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:  
 When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,  
 The line too labors, and the words move slow;  
 Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.

4. Some people have thought that the vowel sound of *beet* seems "little" in contrast to the "big" vowel of *boot*. So also, the *ee* sound may seem "bright" as opposed to the "dark" *oo* sound. Make two columns, headed *ee* and *oo*, and assign the words in the following pairs to the columns, according to the vowel sound that the meanings seem to match.

- |                   |                 |                  |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. fat/thin       | 4. dull/sharp   | 7. fast/slow     |
| 2. round/straight | 5. high/low     | 8. morning/night |
| 3. heavy/light    | 6. clear/cloudy | 9. spring/winter |

5. Add as many words as you can think of to the following phonesthetic sets and describe the symbolic meaning of each phonestheme:

- slide, slip, slush . . .
- strong, struggle, strap . . .
- twist, twirl, twinkle . . .
- hump, bump, lump . . .
- drizzle, fizzle, swizzle . . .

## RHYTHM

All language has rhythm as a result of its prosodic features, which were discussed in Chapter 3. These features, especially stress and pauses, are used not only to emphasize, express emotion, and signal grammatical units but also to make a pattern of strong and weak beats—a **rhythm**. The most precise rhythmic patterns are found in poetry, but they occur also in literary prose and in everyday language. For example, English speakers will normally talk about “a pé<sup>n</sup> and pé<sup>n</sup>cil” rather than “a pé<sup>n</sup>cil and pé<sup>n</sup>.” The first way of ordering the phrase is more balanced in its alternation of strong and weak stresses and is thus more rhythmical. Other compounds that are ordered rhythmically are *cream and sugar*, *rough and ready*, *coat and trousers*, *brush and palette*, *fire and water*. To be sure, rhythmic patterns are not the only thing that influences the order of compounded words; semantics also plays a part. Thus, we usually say “tá<sup>b</sup>le and chá<sup>i</sup>rs” rather than “chá<sup>i</sup>rs and tá<sup>b</sup>le,” perhaps because chairs, as subordinate to a table, seem to belong in second position. When meaning does not determine the order of compounds, however, rhythm usually puts the shorter word first.

The rhythm of carefully written prose is easy to hear, as in the following sentence from a 1941 speech by Sir Winston Churchill: “We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire.”<sup>2</sup> The first compound, *fáil or fálder*, has the rhythmical order typical of such expressions; but the second, *wéaken or tíre*, reverses the pattern, to get the strongly stressed syllable at the end. In view of the meaning being stated, a final unstressed syllable would have been wrong. “We shall not tire or weaken” would have lacked the determination and forcefulness of sound that the stressed last syllable gives. As Churchill wrote the sentence, it expresses the resolution of the English people to see the fight through. Moreover, the beat of the whole line is as regular and as distinct as any found in poetry. The difference between prose and verse is not that prose lacks rhythm, but that it does not sustain a single rhythm as long as poetry does.

The systematic rhythm of poetry, called **meter**, is traditionally said to be of several kinds. **Iambic** meter is a two-beat rhythm in which weak and strong syllables alternate.<sup>3</sup>

À Bóok óf Vérsēs únděrnéath thě Bóugh,  
 À Júg óf Wíne, à Lóaf óf Bréad—ănd Thóu  
 Běsídě mě síngíng ín thě Wílděrněss—  
 Ōh, Wílděrněss wěre Párădise ěnów!

The meter of poetry specifies only two degrees of stress, but as we saw in

<sup>2</sup>In *Blood, Sweat, and Tears* (New York, 1941), p. 462.

<sup>3</sup>Strong syllables are marked with the acute accent (‘) and weak syllables with the breve (˘).

Chapter 3, in English we can pick out several degrees. If we were to read the above lines aloud, distinguishing only the two metrical levels, the result would be a singsong of such monotony that it would submerge the sense of the lines in a rhythmic tom-tom:

a BOOK of VER ses UN der NEATH the BOUGH,  
a JUG of WINE, a LOAF of BREAD—and THOU  
be SIDE me SING ing IN the WIL der NESS—  
oh, WIL der NESS were PAR a DISE e NOW!

Variety is introduced into poetic meter by fitting the greater number of stresses of normal English into a metrical pattern of only two levels. The tension between freer prose rhythm and fixed poetic meter makes verse forms interesting and saves them from a monotonous thump-thumping. Thus one way of reading the above lines from Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is with stresses and pauses as follows, the marking conventions being those of Chapter 3, with the breve used for unstressed vowels:

Ā Bôok ôf Vêrsēs ûndêrneâth thê Bôugh, |  
Ā Jûg ôf Wine, | ă Lôaf ôf Bréad—↑ ând Thôû  
Bêside mē sîngîng in thê Wîldêrnêss—,↑  
Ôh, Wîldêrnêss | wêre Păřdise ênôw! ↓

The requirements of the poetic meter are met as long as there is an alternation of relatively weak and relatively strong syllables. In line three, *me* and *in* have about the same degree of absolute stress, but the secondary stress on *me* is flanked by reduced primaries, so it is metrically weak, whereas the same stress on *in* is flanked by unstressed syllables, which by contrast make it metrically strong. However great the variety of stress may be in these lines, they preserve the iambic meter by alternating relatively weak and strong syllables.

Pauses, or pitch terminals as they are also called, serve two special functions in poetry. They may mark the end of a verse line, as the level pause does after *Bough* in line one above, and they may come within a line to provide momentary breaks in the rhythm, like the pauses after *Wine* and *Bread* in line two. When a terminal pause coincides with the end of a verse line, the line is said to be **end-stopped**. Lines one, three, and four above are end-stopped. Line two, on the other hand, has no pause at its end, but leads directly into the following line: “. . . and Thou Beside me . . .” Such lines are said to be **run-on**. A pause within a line, like that after *Wilderness* in line four, is called a **caesura**.

Although iambic meter is the most common poetic rhythm, there are several others. **Trochaic** meter is, like iambic, a two-beat rhythm, but it begins with the strong syllable, as in the following lines by Leigh Hunt:

Sáy Ī'm wéarŷ, sáy Ī'm sád,  
 Sáy thăt héalth ānd wéalth hāve míss'd mě,  
 Sáy Ī'm grówīng óld, būť ádd,  
 Jénŋŷ kíss'd mě.

The anapestic and dactylic meters are both three-beat rhythms. In **anapestic**, two weak syllables are followed by a strong, as in the lines by Lewis Carroll:

"Yōu āre óld, Fāthēr Willīam," thě yóung mǎn sáid,  
 "Ānd yōur hár hās bēcóme vĕřŷ whíte;  
 Ānd yét yōu íncéssǎntlŷ stánd ōn yōur hēád—  
 Dō yōu thínk, āt yōur áge, ĭt ĭs ríght?"

**Dactylic** meter begins with the strong syllable, as in Thomas Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs":

Tóuch hĕr nŏt scórnfŭllŷ;  
 Thínk ōf hĕr móurnfŭllŷ,  
 Géntlŷ ānd hŭmǎnlŷ;  
 Nót ōf thě stáins ōf hĕr,  
 Āll thăt rĕmáins ōf hĕr  
 Nów ĭs pŭre wómǎnlŷ.

Occasionally poets use the **spondaic** meter, in which strongly stressed syllables predominate, as in these lines by Tennyson:

Bréak, bréak, bréak,  
 Ōn thŷ cöld gráy stónes, Ó Séa!

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a poem called "Metrical Feet," in which he describes and illustrates the five meters just discussed. Using an older terminology, Coleridge speaks of "long" and "short" syllables, instead of "strong" and "weak":

Tróchĕe trípš frŏm lóng tŏ shórt;  
 From long to long in solemn sort  
 Slów Spóndĕe stálks; stróng fóot! yét ĭll áble  
 Ėvĕr tŏ cóme ŭp wĭth Dáctŷl trĭsŷllǎblĕ.  
 Īámbĭcs márch frŏm shórt tŏ lóng;  
 Wĭth ā léap ānd ā bóund thĕ swĭft Ānǎpĕsts thróng.

## Exercise

6. Identify the dominant meter of each of the following:

1. All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
 Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.

2. Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death
3. Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volley'd and thunder'd.
4. Roman Virgil, thou that singest . . .  
Ilion falling, Rome arising
5. The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man,  
And the man said, "Am I your debtor?"  
And the Lord—"Not yet; but make it as clean as you can,  
And then I will let you a better."
6. Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
7. I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke
8. Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.
9. Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and  
flutter  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
10. As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,  
They kill us for their sport.

## DICTION AND METAPHOR

We may value the language of literature for the way it uses the phonological system of the language in creating sound patterns and rhythms. We may also value it for the way it chooses words from the vocabulary, that is, for its **diction**. Jonathan Swift defined style as "proper words in proper places," a proper word being one whose total meaning is exactly right for its context. Meaning, as we saw in the preceding chapter, embraces a word's literal sense, its associations, its grammatical function, and its scope of use. It is with reference to all of these that literary language strives to find the word that is exactly right.

In all language it is important that a word's basic meaning—its literal sense and grammatical function—be appropriate, but in literature it is crucial that the word's nuances—its associations and scope of use—also be as appropriate as they can. When a writer has a choice among a number of synonyms, or words with the same basic meaning, he must choose the one whose nuances best fit the needs of his work. W. B. Yeats wrote a poem called "The Second Coming," which ends in a vision of impending doom with the description of an ominous beast moving in the direction of Bethlehem:



And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

As he was writing the poem, Yeats considered the phrase "has set out for Bethlehem" but rejected it in favor of the expression "slouches toward Bethlehem."<sup>4</sup> Yeats's revision was a good one; "has set out for" is appropriate in sense but lacks any except the most pedestrian associations. "Slouches" suggests a semihuman, stooping movement, the ungainly, loose-limbed stride of a giant animal. In addition to its related meanings, *slouch* contains the phonesthemes *sl-* and *-ouch*, shared by words like *slime*, *slither*, *slash*, *slave*, *slump* and *crouch*, *grouch*, *ouch*, *pouch*, which reinforce its meaning by clang association. For Yeats's poem *slouch* is the proper word in the proper place.

In literature a word's associations may be even more important than its literal sense, and the more associations it has—provided they are relevant to the work of literature—the better the word is. In expository language multiple meanings are a vice to be weeded out whenever possible, but in literature they are a virtue to be cultivated. Several meanings can be compacted in a single word not only as associations, but as literal senses as well. A **polysemous** word, one that has several distinct senses, may be used in more than one of its meanings at the same time. For example, William Blake wrote a poem called "London" in which he described the corrosive effect the city can have upon men, beginning with these lines:

I wander through each chartered street,  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

If Blake had wanted to avoid repeating the word *mark* in the last line, he might have written "Signs of weakness, signs of woe." But if he had so written, his poem would have been the poorer. *Mark* has the advantage of having several senses that are appropriate to the context and that consequently reinforce one another. In the fourth line the dominant sense of the word is 'signs' or 'indications.' In addition, however, a mark can be a defilement, a scar, or a stain; when a thing is marked, it is defaced. A mark is also a sign of ownership, like a brand. These secondary meanings fit the poem, for Blake is saying that the life of the city-dweller scars and brands him. If we ask what the word means here, whether 'indications,' 'scars,' or 'ownership signs,' the answer must be that it means all three things, and all three simultaneously. The word has the kind of systematic ambiguity that Pound intended when he said great literature is language charged with meaning.

Occasionally writers go even farther afield in an effort to compress several

<sup>4</sup>Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines* (Oxford, 1963), p. 23.

meanings into one word, by having recourse to the pun. To pun is to use one word in a context where another word with a quite different meaning but similar pronunciation can also make sense. It is thus a systematic use of homonyms. In grosser forms it is a technique often found in jokes, like *Have you heard about the monk who ripped his garments because he was a holy tearer?* The device has also been used by poets in serious contexts, for example, the last stanza of John Donne's "A Hymn to God the Father":

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun  
 My last thread I shall perish on the shore;  
 Swear by Thyself that at my death Thy *son*  
 Shall shine as He shines now and heretofore;  
 And having done that Thou hast *done*,  
 I fear no *more*.

The italicized words are puns: the first on *sun*, a common word play in the seventeenth century when this poem was written; the second on the poet's own name, *Donne*; and the third on the maiden name of his wife, Ann *More*. The use of puns—which can be called *paronomasia* if a fancier term is wanted—though often thought to be a low form of humor, is common in some of our best authors, such as Shakespeare.

Another way of using the vocabulary to condense meaning is the *metaphor*, which is an expression that has been transferred from its normal, literal meaning to a different but analogous one. Metaphor is common in all varieties of language. It is found in everyday conversation: "He thought the car was a *peach*, but it turned out to be a *lemon*." It is found in literary prose, like William Jennings Bryan's 1896 speech against the gold standard: "You shall not *press down upon the brow* of labor this *crown of thorns*. You shall not *crucify* mankind *upon a cross of gold*." And of course it is found in poetry, like Tennyson's "the black bat, night, has flown," which equates the passing of night with a bat's flight, or Robert Herrick's advice "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time":

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,  
 Old time is still a-flying:  
 And this same flower that smiles today  
 Tomorrow will be dying,

in which the rosebud is a metaphor for the transitory pleasure of first love.

The essence of the metaphor is that it finds a similarity between two things that are on first consideration quite different from each other. It points up an unfamiliar aspect of a familiar scene and thus provides a new way of looking at the world. The metaphors of literature must therefore be fresh and new, but the metaphors of daily speech are often stale and shopworn. The first man to use the term *lemon* for a person or thing that fails to perform

as expected created a vivid metaphor based on a similarity between our reactions to the sourness of lemon juice and to an inferior performance. But, as the term became widely used, it turned into a cliché. Nowadays there are doubtless many speakers who use the word with no consciousness of its metaphorical origin; for them the meaning 'inferior object' has become just one more sense of the word *lemon*. Thus, dead metaphors are reincarnated as living meanings, a process of semantic transfer already examined in the preceding chapter.

A metaphor is a **figure of speech**, an intentional deviation from the normal use of words; there are a number of other figures, some of which are special kinds of metaphor. If two things are said to be similar rather than directly identified with each other, the figure is called a **simile**. Thus, *The gold standard is a crown of thorns* is a metaphor proper, but *The gold standard is like a crown of thorns* is a simile. The difference between the two figures, which is not of much practical consequence, is that in the simile there will always be present some expression—*like, as, similar to, reminds us of*—that asserts an analogy is being made, while in the metaphor one thing is simply said to be another. In **personification**, a thing or abstraction is treated like a human being, as John Keats in his "Ode on Melancholy" speaks of

Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu.

In **synecdoche**, the name for a part is used for the whole or vice versa; an example is in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas,

in which the claws are used as a synecdoche for the whole crab. **Metonymy** is a figure in which a thing is named after something associated with it, for example *palette* is used for 'painting' and *fiddle-bow* for 'music' in the opening lines of W. B. Yeats's "Lapis Lazuli" describing those who find art not relevant to political and social issues:

I have heard that hysterical women say  
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow.

**Hyperbole** is an exaggerated statement, like Chaucer's description of two young men that dueled over a girl: "Up to the ankle fought they in hir [their] blood." **Litotes** is an understatement that negates the opposite of what is intended, for example *not brave* for 'cowardly' or a line from the Old English poem *Beowulf*, "The prince would not let his murderous guest escape alive," which is to say he killed him. **Paradox** is a statement that seems absurd because it is self-contradictory but is nevertheless sensible, for example Milton's description of the climate in hell: "the parching air / Burns froze

[frozen], and cold performs th' effect of fire." A paradoxical phrase like *bittersweet* or *loud silence* is called an **oxymoron**, literally 'a keen foolishness.' **Irony** is a statement whose literal sense is the opposite of what is intended; thus, Jonathan Swift in "A Modest Proposal" suggested that the best way to control the size of the Irish population would be to sell the children of the poor to the landlords as meat, thereby suggesting that absentee landlords were already devouring the population. A **mixed metaphor** is a combination of incompatible figures of speech, like *The doctor, while believing her to be at death's door, felt he could pull her through* or Hamlet's "to take arms against a sea of troubles," where an unmixed metaphor might have taken arms against a band of troubles or perhaps built a dike against a sea.

In addition to metaphor and its variants, literary language uses other forms of expression, such as imagery, conceits, symbolism, and allegory. An **image** is a picture drawn with words, often designed to give a concrete expression to abstract ideas, for example Shelley's poem "Ozymandias":

I met a traveler from an antique land  
 Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
 Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
 The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed.  
 And on the pedestal these words appear:  
 "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The poem is simply the vivid description of a ruined statue in the desert, but the image serves as a comment on the vanity of human pride in a more memorable way than could a straightforward statement. A **conceit** is a far-fetched or long, drawn-out analogy, such as John Donne's "The Flea," in which he speaks of a flea that has bitten both him and a woman he wants to seduce and likens the mingling of their blood in the insect to their sexual union. The term **symbol** is used in several different ways, but in literary use it most often means a thing that stands for or calls to mind some other thing because of an analogical resemblance between them, as a star is a symbol of hope or water one of life. In this use of the term, a symbol is a thing, whereas a metaphor is a word or phrase. An **allegory** is an extended symbolic story, like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which a journey is taken as a symbol of life and the central character, named Christian, has adventures

with a number of other symbolic characters like Mr. Worldly Wiseman, in places like Doubting Castle. Although symbolism abounds in modern literature, allegory is not much in favor. It was, however, very common in earlier times.

### Exercises

7. Choose the word in parentheses that best suits the context.
  1. Humor is emotional (agitation, chaos, confusion) remembered in tranquillity.—James Thurber
  2. Human history becomes more and more a race between education and (catastrophe, destruction, misfortune).—H. G. Wells
  3. The young man who has not wept is a (monster, primitive, savage), and the old man who will not laugh is a fool.—George Santayana
  4. The worst (bodies, cliques, groups) are those which consist of one man.—G. B. Shaw
  5. Poetry is a comforting piece of fiction set to more or less (lascivious, lewd, sensuous) music.—H. L. Mencken
  6. Men to whom life had appeared as a reversible coat—(rough, seamy, sordid) on both sides.—O. Henry
  
8. What things are compared with one another in the following metaphors and similes? In what ways are the compared things similar?
  1. Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end.—William Shakespeare
  2. Life is made up of marble and mud.—Nathaniel Hawthorne
  3. Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity.—P. B. Shelley
  4. To many people dramatic criticism must seem like an attempt to tattoo soap bubbles.—John Mason Brown
  5. The evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table.—T. S. Eliot

### GRAMMAR AND BEYOND

In addition to sound patterns and diction, literary language also uses grammar to create special effects. Whenever there are sentences that are grammatically different in their surface structures but semantically alike in their deep structure, the choice among them has consequences for literary



style. The difference between “The people’s sense of dedication to the United States has been renewed by them on each national day of inauguration since 1789” and “On each national day of inauguration since 1789 the people have renewed their sense of dedication to the United States”<sup>5</sup> is not in what is said, but in two differences of form. The introductory phrase of the second version creates a feeling of expectation as it leads up to the main clause, in which the key bit of information, the phrase “dedication to the United States,” is withheld until the last. A statement that puts its essential idea at the end, with subordinate elements at the beginning, is called a **periodic sentence**. A **loose sentence**, on the other hand, is one like the first version above that puts the main idea first and follows it with subordinate elements, trailing off to the end. Loose structure is normal in our everyday language; periodic structure is more characteristic of formal or of literary style. The other difference between the two versions cited above is that the first has a passive verb and the second an active. The active expression suggests decisiveness, directness, a straightforward, no-nonsense-about-it tone. By contrast the passive sentence is indirect and roundabout; it suggests the event is something that happens to people rather than an action they do. Because it plays down or leaves altogether unmentioned the role of the agent in a sentence, the passive construction can be a way of avoiding responsibility. A child responding to the question “What happened to your dish?” with the answer “It got broke” instead of “I broke it” is an amateur artist with words. By using the passive he disclaims any personal responsibility for the event. Similarly, in literary language the choice between active and passive depends on the effect the writer is aiming at.

The choice between a series of short, simple sentences, either independent of one another or compounded with conjunctions like *but* or *and*, and a single long, complex sentence with many subordinate clauses is another difference in grammatical structure that is a part of literary style. Each of the following sentences contains six clauses:

In the day time the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference.<sup>6</sup>

It was in motion, in the air, coming toward them—a heavy body crashing with tremendous force against the door so that the thick door jumped and clattered in its frame, the animal, whatever it was, hurling itself against the door again seemingly before it could have touched the floor and got a new purchase to spring from.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The opening sentence of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s third inaugural address, 1941.

<sup>6</sup>Ernest Hemingway, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” *The Hemingway Reader* (New York, 1953), p. 417.

<sup>7</sup>William Faulkner, “The Bear,” *The Faulkner Reader* (New York, 1953), pp. 270–71.



There is, however, a great difference between the structure of the two sentences, which can be partly shown by printing them so that coordinate clauses are directly under one another, whereas subordinate clauses are indented:

In the day time the street was dusty,  
 but at night the dew settled the dust  
 and the old man liked to sit late  
     because he was deaf  
     and now at night it was quiet  
     and he felt the difference.

It was in motion, in the air, coming toward them—  
     a heavy body crashing with tremendous force against the door<sup>8</sup>  
     so that the thick door jumped and clattered in its frame,  
         the animal      hurling itself against the door again  
         whatever it was,  
             seemingly before it could have touched the floor  
             and got a new purchase to spring from.

Not only does the second passage have far more subordination than the first but its clauses are themselves more complex. The two sentences are as different as a simple Doric column is from an elaborate Corinthian, a difference due partly to the individual styles of the two authors, but partly to the contrast in subject matter. An old man sitting alone in the quiet of the evening should not be described in the same way as a wild beast struggling to escape from a closed room. It is the skillful fitting of form to content that makes literature.

There are a number of other regular ways sentences can be structured to literary ends, of which we will consider just three. **Parallelism** is the repetition of a grammatical structure, as in the last sentence of Lincoln's second inaugural address:

With malice toward none;  
 with charity for all;  
 with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on  
     to finish the work we are in;  
     to bind up the nation's wounds;  
     to care for him who shall have borne the battle,  
         and for his widow  
         and his orphan—  
     to do all which may achieve  
         and cherish a just  
             and lasting peace among ourselves,  
             and with all nations.

<sup>8</sup>The second and fourth are nonfinite clauses, that is, their verbs, "crashing" and "hurling," are not the kind that can be used as the only verb of a complete sentence. The mixture of finite and nonfinite clauses further adds to the structural complexity.

**Chiasm** (from a Greek word that means ‘crossing’) involves grammatical parallelism between two sentences, but with a reversal of words, as in the following example from John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address:

Let us never negotiate out of fear.

But let us never fear to negotiate.

**Climax** is a series of parallel constructions so ordered that they increase in forcefulness until the last and most important is reached. A famous example is from Sir Winston Churchill’s 1940 speech on Dunkirk: “We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.” The opposite construction, known as **anticlimax**, is exemplified by a remark attributed to Richard Daley, Mayor of Chicago: “They have vilified me, they have crucified me, yes, they have even criticized me.”

Although the sentence is the largest unit that grammar is normally concerned with, bigger linguistic structures are important in literary use. Thus, the sentences of prose are organized into a **paragraph**, which will often have a **topic sentence** to summarize its content and a number of other sentences to develop it by giving details, examples, and qualifications or by otherwise expanding the main idea. Not all paragraphs have the neat structure that books on English composition suggest they should, but a well-wrought paragraph will at least have some unity of content that sets it off from adjacent ones.

Poetry has its own system of larger organizational units, paralleling those of prose. Instead of the sentence, the basic unit of poetry is the **line**, or **verse**, of which there are various lengths, as measured by the number of **feet**, or rhythmic units. The most common are the following:

| NAME              | LENGTH | EXAMPLE                                                                     |
|-------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Monometer</b>  | 1 foot | Praise him.                                                                 |
| <b>Dimeter</b>    | 2 feet | Thy voice   is sweet.                                                       |
| <b>Trimeter</b>   | 3 feet | Sing no   sad songs   for me.                                               |
| <b>Tetrameter</b> | 4 feet | Stone walls   do not   a pris   on make.                                    |
| <b>Pentameter</b> | 5 feet | Euclid   alone   has looked   on beau   ty bare.                            |
| <b>Hexameter</b>  | 6 feet | All night   upon   my heart   I felt   her warm   heart beat.               |
| <b>Heptameter</b> | 7 feet | Death slew   not him,   but he   made death   his lad   der to   the skies. |

Lines are combined with various patterns of rime into a **stanza**, of which only a few types are illustrated here. The simplest kind of stanza is the **couplet**, consisting of two lines, like this from Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall”:

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore,  
And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.

The most famous three-line stanza, or **triplet**, is the **terza rima**, in which the first and third lines rhyme with each other while the second rhymes with the beginning of the next stanza. Its rhyme scheme can be represented by the formula *aba bcb cdc* . . . . An example is Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind":

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing.

There are several kinds of four-line stanzas, or **quatrains**. The following from Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," with the rhyme scheme *abcb* and alternate tetrameter and trimeter lines, is known as a **ballad stanza**:

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

The best known five-line stanza is the **limerick**, which rhymes *aabba*, combining rigor of form with triviality of subject matter:

There was a young fellow of Wight,  
Whose speed was much faster than light.  
He set out one day  
In a relative way  
And returned on the preceding night.

**Rime royal**, a seven-line stanza rhyming *ababbcc*, is so named because it was used by King James I of Scotland, although its most famous practitioner was Geoffrey Chaucer, whose "Complaint to His Purse" begins, in a slightly modernized version, as follows:

To you, my purse, and to no other wight [person]  
Complain I, for ye be my lady dear.  
I am so sorry, now that ye be light,  
For certain, unless ye make me heavy cheer,  
I would as lief be laid upon my bier.  
Wherefore unto your mercy thus I cry:  
Be heavy again, or else I'll have to die.

**Ottava rima** is an eight-line stanza rhyming *abababcc*, most brilliantly used in English literature by Lord Byron in *Don Juan*:

'Tis a sad thing, I cannot choose but say,  
And all the fault of that indecent sun,  
Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay,

But will keep baking, broiling, burning on,  
 That howsoever people fast and pray,  
 The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone:  
 What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,  
 Is much more common where the climate's sultry.

The **Spenserian stanza** of nine lines riming *ababbcbcc* is named for its originator, Edmund Spenser, but it has been used by other poets, for example, Shelley in "Adonais," an elegy for Keats:

He is made one with Nature: there is heard  
 His voice in all her music, from the moan  
 Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;  
 He is a presence to be felt and known  
 In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
 Spreading itself where'er that Power may move  
 Which has withdrawn his being to its own;  
 Which wields the world with never-wearied love,  
 Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

The best known of all stanza forms is the **sonnet**, a fourteen-line poem with two principal varieties. "Ozymandias," cited earlier, is an example of the Italian form with two parts, the first eight lines or **octave** and the last six lines or **sestet**. The English sonnet with three quatrains and a final couplet is most famous for its use by Shakespeare, as in the following sonnet rimed *ababcdcdefeggg*:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
 Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
 Which by and by black night doth take away,  
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,  
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
 As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
 Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Rime is not indispensable to poetry. **Blank verse**, while preserving regular meter and line length, makes no systematic use of rime, as in these lines put into the mouth of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice,  
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

**Free verse**, though it is rhythmical and has a variety of sound effects, abandons both strict meter and rime, as in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*:

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;  
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than  
he.  
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff  
woven.

Beyond the prose paragraph and the poetic stanza there are still larger organizational units—chapters, acts, books—according to the type of literary work, or **genre**. Each type has its own characteristic organization, although because genres are literary structures an author has a good deal of freedom in deciding whether he will adhere to or depart from the traditions associated with them. Genres include fictional types, like the short story and the novel; nonfictional types, like the essay and the history; literary forms that imply a performance, like the play and the sermon; poetic forms, like the elegy and the epic; and forms that have some particular purpose, like the myth, designed to explain natural phenomena, and the satire, intended to correct faults. Still larger structures can be found beyond the genre unit; for example, novels are sometimes grouped into trilogies and plays into cycles. Thus the principle of hierarchy reaches above the sentence to take in vast amounts of literary language—indeed, being without upper limits, it constantly expands to meet man's unquenchable thirst for order.

It is easy to fall into the mistake of thinking that lexical and grammatical regularity are inherently valuable and that any departure from them is a sickness of language. The truth is that whereas they are indispensable when language is being put to certain uses—especially its informative, logical uses, which we will consider in the next chapter—a strict adherence to the normal is unnecessary or even undesirable when language is put to other uses, such as its evocative, literary use. It is also true that the kind of literary departure from normal language we all make, for instance in our daily use of metaphor, is one of the important causes of language change. In a real sense poetry makes our language what it is today—and what it will be tomorrow.

## Exercise

- Below are the opening passages of three novels that present themselves as autobiographical narratives. How do they differ from one another stylistically, especially in sentence structure and diction?

1. I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost;—Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,—I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that in which the reader is likely to see me.

Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 1759

2. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 1849

3. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father.

J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 1951



# 8

## LOGIC

“I know what you’re thinking about,” said Tweedledum; “but it isn’t so, nohow.”

“Contrariwise,” continued Tweedledee, “if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn’t, it ain’t. That’s logic.”<sup>1</sup>

Logic seems to many people to be just what Tweedledee apparently thought it—fancy footwork with words for the purpose of confusing the opposition, or as Joseph Wood Krutch once described it, “the art of going wrong with confidence.” Logic is indeed concerned with words and with going wrong, but its aim is to prevent rather than encourage errors in our use of language. Specifically, logic tries to help us decide when one statement can be relied on as evidence for another. It is thus concerned with one of the many functions of language—the informative, reasoning function—not the most common use of language perhaps, but certainly the most important for science, history, and learning in general.

<sup>1</sup>Charles Dodgson, *Through the Looking-Glass*, Chapter 4. Although Dodgson, better known by his penname Lewis Carroll, is remembered as the author of *Alice in Wonderland* and other writings for children, most of his readers are probably unaware that he was a mathematician and logician who wove into the whimsical nonsense of his stories a good deal of serious logic. For a study of Dodgson’s literary logic see Daniel F. Kirk, *Charles Dodgson, Semeiotician* (Gainesville, Fla., 1962).

## THE LOGICAL USE OF LANGUAGE

Informative language, as we saw in Chapter 7, consists of statements that can be either true or false. A true statement is one that corresponds to an actual state of affairs, one that is faithful to the facts and “tells it like it is.”<sup>2</sup> The statements that make up informative language, called **propositions**, can have their truth decided in any of three ways, and consequently there are three kinds of propositions: analytic, synthetic, and metaphysical.

Analytic propositions are statements like *No bachelor is married*, *Entomologists study insects*, *Two plus two equals four*, or their contradictions—*All bachelors are married*, *Entomologists study words*, *Two plus two does not equal four*. An analytic proposition is true or false according to the meaning of its words and the way they are put together. The statement *Entomologists study insects* is a true one; it corresponds with reality. Yet we do not have to consult reality to recognize the truth of the statement. In particular, no one would ever need to make a survey of the world’s entomologists, asking each of them, “Do you now or did you ever in the past study insects?” Similarly, there is no need to take a census of the world’s married men to discover that none of them are bachelors. Since the term *entomologist* means ‘one who studies insects,’ and *bachelor* means ‘an unmarried man,’ the statement *Entomologists study insects* is true, and *All bachelors are married* is false. We know how they correspond with the facts about entomologists and bachelors without having to consult those facts because the statements are really definitions in disguise. Mathematical statements are also analytical; to be sure that two plus two equals four there is no need to go around looking for things that come in two sets of two to make sure that they always count up to four. What we learn in early childhood about the meaning of the words *two*, *four*, *plus*, and *equals* is enough to convince any reasonable man that the mathematical proposition *Two plus two equals four* will necessarily be true.

Analytical propositions are thus either necessarily true, in which case they are called **tautologies**, or they are necessarily false, in which case they are **self-contradictions**. Apart from the legitimate use of tautology in definitions, it is found most often in careless writing. The student who writes of “an unmarried bachelor” is likely to find “Wordy” or “Redundant” scrawled in the margin of his paper. Self-contradictions are usually the product of error, so that anyone who believes that entomologists study words rather than insects has simply got his terms confused. Occasionally apparent self-contradiction

<sup>2</sup>Philosophers who are concerned with epistemology—or how we know what we know—would quite properly regard this definition of truth as a naive oversimplification. However, it will do for purposes of this discussion.

is used for the sake of paradox, as in the case of the coed who insisted that she knew some married bachelors. We can assume that she was using her words in an uncommon way. If by *bachelor* she meant 'one who acts like an unmarried man,' her statement might well be true—depending on the facts. But then it would belong to the second kind of proposition.

Synthetic propositions are statements like *Water expands when it freezes*, *Mount Everest is 30,000 feet high*, *Fifty-eight percent of all Americans are women*, *The planet Mars has a primitive form of vegetation*, *By the year 2000 computers will be as common as refrigerators*, and *Columbus discovered America in 1492*. All of these are statements whose truth depends on the state of affairs they describe. Moreover, we can gather evidence in various ways to support or disprove the propositions. We can conduct experiments with freezing water to discover whether or not it expands; we can use various instruments to measure the height of mountains; we can count a carefully controlled sample of the population or consult the most recent census to determine the percentage of women in the country. Although telescopes and interplanetary rockets can help us decide about life on Mars, we may have to wait until men actually land on the planet to be sure whether or not it has a primitive form of vegetation; nevertheless, the question is clearly a factual one, capable of resolution by consulting the facts. Similarly, all questions about the future, such as the prevalence of computers in the year 2000, can be tentatively answered on the basis of projections from what we know about the present and the past; but a definitive answer will be available when the future arrives. Questions about the past may be much more difficult to answer definitively. There is not much doubt that Columbus did arrive in the New World in 1492, but other historical propositions—for instance, *Columbus was the first European to visit America*—are much harder to be sure of. Even so, they are statements about factual matters that we could resolve with a high level of confidence, given the appropriate facts.

Unlike analytic propositions, synthetic statements can be either true or false without causing us to revise our notions about language. We revise instead our notions about things. For example, if anyone seriously maintains that some bachelors are married, he must be using the word *bachelor* or the word *married* in a different sense from the common one, and consequently his hearers may revise their notions of what those words can mean. On the other hand, if a knowledgeable person maintains that Mars has no form of life whatever, his hearers will be led to examine the facts that he used as evidence; and if his reasoning seems good, they will revise whatever notions they may have of how things are on Mars.

Because synthetic statements must stand the test of experience they are called **empirical** statements, the word *empirical* coming from a Greek source that meant 'appertaining to experience.' When an empirical statement is put

forth as a proposition whose truth needs investigation, it is called a **hypothesis**, about which there will be more later.

There is, however, one kind of synthetic proposition that is a curiosity of language. Consider a statement like the following: *All the poems on this page you are now looking at are written in French*. It looks like a perfectly normal synthetic statement to which truth ought to be relevant, but when we try to decide whether it is in fact true or false, we run into a problem. *It is true that all the poems on this page are written in French* and *It is false that all the poems on this page are written in French* both seem odd. The trouble is that the statement smuggles in an assumption that is false—namely, that there are some poems on this page. What looks like a single statement is really two joined by *and*: *There are some poems on this page, and all those poems are written in French*. Since the first statement is false, the second, which depends upon the truth of the first, is neither true nor false; it is irrelevant. There are no facts to judge it by. Because we cannot apply notions of truth and falsity to a statement like *All the poems on this page are written in French*, it is not a proposition at all, but a **pseudo proposition**. Other examples are *The Emperor of Texas lives in Austin*, *Some unicorns have pink hooves*, and *Apples that grow on peach trees are sour*.<sup>3</sup>

It may seem perfectly obvious that pseudo propositions are not normal statements that can be judged true or false like any other, but philosophers have sometimes gotten badly tangled up in them and have hunted for a world where it makes sense to debate the color of a unicorn's hooves or the homesite of the Emperor of Texas. Also, arguers who do not scruple to make a point dishonestly may use them. For example, there is the old story about the lawyer who questioned a hostile witness, "Have you stopped beating your wife? Answer yes or no." In more subtle guises, pseudo propositions are found in quarrels and in propaganda.

Finally we have **metaphysical propositions**. They are statements that ought to be either true or false, depending on what the facts are. In that way they are like synthetic propositions, but in another way they are quite different, since there is no conceivable way we could ever test their truth. Some examples of metaphysical propositions are *Everything has a cause*, *Man has free will*, *Physical matter is the only thing that is real*, and *God is spirit*. There is no possible way to decide objectively by empirical evidence whether everything in the universe is caused or whether particular things are the result of chance or free will. There are no observations to be made, no experiments to be set up, no human testimony to be relied on. We must either decide

<sup>3</sup>Many contemporary logicians deal with pseudo propositions in a different way, but the treatment accorded them here is more in keeping with the "common-sense" view mirrored in our normal use of language.

that we do not know and cannot know about such matters, or we must adopt one of the positions on faith.

Some metaphysical propositions look as though they are disguised or unconscious definitions. When people argue about whether matter or mind is the only “reality,” they may be assuming opposite definitions of *reality*. If *reality* is taken to mean ‘that which is material,’ then *Matter is the only reality* is a tautology. The statement would automatically be true, but since it will certainly be difficult to get general agreement that this assumed definition of *reality* is an appropriate one, the metaphysical problem remains.

Metaphysical propositions are neither trivial nor “merely academic.” On the contrary, they form the basis for much religion, philosophy, and even quite mundane affairs like politics. When the founding fathers wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal . . .” they were listing the metaphysical propositions that formed the basis for the American Revolution. A self-evident truth is after all one for which there is no empirical evidence and is thus metaphysical; yet it can have a profound effect on the lives of men. There will be a considerable difference in our actions, depending on whether we believe that all men are created equal or whether we believe that all are equal, but some are more equal than others, as the pigs in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* held. And if men are equal, we must be clear about where the equality lies. Certainly all are not born the same in height, health, or family; nor—though it is unpopular to admit it—are they born equal in aptitudes, intelligence, or sensibility. The equality intended by the founding fathers must be of some other kind—a metaphysical one that makes it wrong for one man to dominate and tyrannize another. Without for a moment denying the importance and practical consequence of such statements, we should recognize that they can never be verified, that there is no empirical evidence relevant to them, but only an intuitive acknowledgment of their self-evident nature. Sometimes metaphysical propositions are called non-sense because they do not depend on sense experiences, but the negative associations of *nonsense* make the term an inappropriate one and suggest some hidden metaphysical assumptions. Metaphysics is not foolish. The truth is that the most basic statements we can make about any subject, the notions that underlie all we say about things-as-they-are, are metaphysical propositions.

Language that consists of propositions—whether analytic, synthetic, or metaphysical—grouped together so as to explain or report their subject is known as **exposition**. If however, the propositions are so combined that some of them are offered as reasons for our believing others, we have the form of discourse that is of most interest to logic—namely, **argument**. The word *argument* has many meanings. In the everyday sense of the word, an argument is a dispute or a quarrel, as when two men are furiously shouting at each other, each trying to win over, or at least silence, his opponent by the fre-



quency and loudness with which he repeats his opinion. But that is not what *argument* means in logic. When we make a statement, which we believe to be true, and offer in support of it other statements, whose truth is more certain, we are engaging in a logical argument, the aim of which is not to convince the opposition at any cost but to demonstrate the truth as conclusively as possible. There are two ways of achieving that end, and hence two kinds of argument.

## Exercises

1. Tell whether each of the following propositions is analytic, synthetic, or metaphysical.
  1. Zero times any number equals zero.
  2. Every man has the right to think as he pleases, though not to do as he pleases.
  3. The moon is a natural satellite of the earth.
  4. The moon is made of green cheese.
  5. All we know we have learned through sensory experience.
  6. The more often a word is used, the shorter it is likely to be.
  7. At least one of that orphan's parents is dead.
  8. Independence Day is the first Monday in July.
  9. Independence Day is a holiday commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.
  10. Life is the product of a vital force that is different in its effects from physicochemical forces and cannot be measured by instruments designed to deal with them.
2. Is each of the following exposition or argument?
  1. Williams is at bat now. Gronski's pitching. It's a sunny day, but not too hot here at the stadium. Now here's the windup. Williams swings, but it's low and outside for ball one. Gronski wants to put this batter out.
  2. Williams is at bat now. Gronski's pitching. Two out, and the bases are loaded. It's the top of the ninth, and the score's tied. Gronski wants to put this batter out.
  3. Alfred of Wessex was the greatest king England has ever known. He saved his country from foreign rule by defeating the invading Danes and created a system of laws that brought domestic order to his subjects. He was a patron of learning as well as a scholar in his own right.
  4. Melt one-half cup chocolate. Beat in three egg yolks and one



teaspoon vanilla extract. Beat three egg whites until stiff and fold into chocolate mixture. Refrigerate.

5. Most students, both male and female, do not get enough exercise. They are also lacking in a sense of order and responsibility. They know too little about some of the careers that are open to them. Their patriotism needs to be encouraged. ROTC should be required.

## TWO KINDS OF ARGUMENT: DEDUCTION AND INDUCTION

Here is a very simple kind of argument:

All cats chase mice, and since Macavity is a cat, he certainly chases mice too.

In every argument, certain statements, called **premises**, are offered as reasons for some other statement, the **conclusion**. The simple argument given above contains two premises, *All cats chase mice* and *Macavity is a cat*, which support the conclusion, *Macavity chases mice*. The act of drawing the conclusion from the premises is called **inference**; it is what makes an argument out of a series of statements that would otherwise be merely a report. Through the use of words like *because* or *since* in the premises, or words like *therefore* in the conclusion, we can signal that we are inferring, and not just listing a series of unconnected facts. Such signals are not always present in arguments, but when they can be supplied you know you are dealing with argumentation.

Traditional logic has a standard form, called the **syllogism**, that it uses for all arguments like the one we are looking at here. If we paraphrase the argument slightly to make it fit the syllogistic formula, it will come out like this:

MAJOR PREMISE: All cats are mouse-chasers.

MINOR PREMISE: Macavity is a cat.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, Macavity is a mouse-chaser.

The terms in a syllogism are either **general**, like *cat* and *mouse-chaser*, if they can refer to various creatures, or **individual**, like *Macavity* or *this cat sleeping on the chair*, if they refer to just one. The syllogism must contain exactly three terms, one of which, called the **middle term**, appears in both of the premises, but not in the conclusion. In the argument above, the middle term is *cat*. If the subject of a proposition is a general term, it will be either **universal** by referring to all the things it names or **particular** by referring only to some of them. Each proposition is also either **affirmative** (*Some cats*

*are long-haired*) or negative (*Some cats are not long-haired*). There are thus four kinds of propositions that can occur in a syllogism:

|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATIVE:  | All X are Y.      |
| UNIVERSAL NEGATIVE:     | No X are Y.       |
| PARTICULAR AFFIRMATIVE: | Some X are Y.     |
| PARTICULAR NEGATIVE:    | Some X are not Y. |

When the subject of a proposition is an individual term, like *Macavity* in two of the statements above, it counts as a universal; consequently, in the argument we are examining, all three propositions are universal affirmatives.

If we want to criticize an argument, to decide whether or not we should accept its conclusion, there are two questions we must ask: Are the premises true? and Is the inference valid? The premise statements will be true, as suggested earlier about all propositions, if they correspond with the facts by representing things as they are. The test of truth sounds easy, but it may be exceedingly hard to use, requiring as it does careful observation. Turning to the second question, we find that the inference will be valid if the conclusion follows reliably from the premises, as it does in the argument about *Macavity*. In *Macavity*'s case, the inference is not only reliable; it is necessary. That is to say, if the premises about all cats chasing mice and about *Macavity* being a cat are true, there is no way the conclusion can be wrong; it is inevitably, necessarily, inescapably true. An inference of that kind is called **deductive**.

If either of the requirements of a sound argument—that it have true premises and a valid inference—is not met, the argument has gone wrong. For example, suppose we were to argue:

All fish live in trees, and all dogs are fish, so all dogs must live in trees.

The argument, albeit an idiotic one, is perfectly valid—that is, if fish lived in trees and if dogs were fish, then dogs would live in trees. The problem is obviously that the premises are false. On the other hand, consider a different argument:

Some fish eat worms, and some dogs eat fish, so some dogs must eat worms too.

In this case the premises are both true, but the inference is invalid. The conclusion simply does not follow from the statements offered in support of it. Notice that the conclusion may or may not be true—there might be some peculiar canine that had developed a taste for worms—but even if the conclusion were a factual statement, its truth would not have been proved by the argument. An argument based on invalid inference is known as a **fallacy**. Fallacies can look very much like sound arguments, but however superficially convincing, they are frauds in the guise of an honest argument.

Now, what about Macavity? Is the argument about him sound or not? We have already said that the inference in this argument is valid.<sup>4</sup> That leaves only the truth of the premises. Let us agree without further discussion that Macavity is indeed a cat. But what about the generalization with which the argument began? Is it a fact that all cats chase mice? This premise is the crucial one. The whole argument depends on its truth, which has to be established by another sort of argument, for instance:

Pyewacket chases mice, and he is a cat; so probably all cats chase mice.

How does this argument differ from the one about Macavity? In a sense, it is just the reverse. Here the premises *Pyewacket chases mice* and *Pyewacket is a cat* support the generalization *All cats chase mice*, which is the crucial premise of the earlier argument.

But the important difference between the two arguments lies in the certainty of their conclusions. In the deductive argument about Macavity the conclusion was a necessary truth, provided the premises stated facts. In the argument about Pyewacket, however, we can grant the truth of the premises, that he is a cat and does chase mice, but the conclusion is at best only an uncertain probability. The Pyewacket argument is **inductive**, and as with all inductions, its conclusion is tentative. The probability of the conclusion's being true could be strengthened by giving stronger premises:

Pyewacket chases mice, and I know of twelve other cats that all chase mice too. Furthermore, I have never heard of a cat that did not chase mice.

Or still stronger:

A survey of 125,000 cats has revealed that every cat surveyed chases mice.

As we strengthen the premises we increase the probability of truth of the conclusion, but however strong we make the argument, we will never be able to say that the conclusion *All cats chase mice* is a necessary and inescapable truth. We could investigate every cat now living and all records of those that

<sup>4</sup>Formal logic has a set of rules for determining which syllogisms contain valid inference. Briefly they are: (1) At least one of the premises must be affirmative; (2) If both premises are affirmative, so must the conclusion be; (3) If one premise is negative, so must the conclusion be; (4) In at least one premise the middle term must be distributed (that is, be either the subject of a universal proposition or the predicate of a negative one); and (5) If either term is distributed in the conclusion, it must be distributed in the premises. Any argument that meets all these requirements is valid. In Macavity's case, (1) Both premises are affirmative; (2) So is the conclusion; (3) The third rule is not applicable; (4) The middle term is distributed (*all cats*) in the major premise; and (5) *Macavity* as an individual term is counted as a universal and thus distributed in both the conclusion and the minor premise. However, even without going through these rules of inference, it is probably obvious to most readers that the conclusion about Macavity does follow from the premises.

have gone to whatever reward awaits good mousers and thus discover that in every case the cat liked to chase mice. Yet, we would not have an argument of necessary validity; the conclusion would still be only probable. The day after we finished our investigation a kitten might be born that would be as afraid of mice as elephants are reputed to be, thus falsifying our conclusion and demonstrating that our argument was fallible.

Given true premises, a valid deductive argument leads to a necessarily true conclusion. Given true premises, even the best inductive argument leads to a conclusion that is no more than probably true. Inductive conclusions can never be proved unquestionably right; they can be proved wrong by a single contradiction and are consequently the most tenuous of truths. Yet, they form the basis of all our reasoning. For just as the argument about Macavity presupposed an argument like that about Pyewacket, every deductive argument assumes one or more inductive arguments. Thus, every necessarily true conclusion rests on a premise that is only probable. Since inductive arguments are the foundation of our thinking, they need to be as sound as we can make them.

A sound argument, as we have said, must have true premises and valid inference. In judging the validity of an inductive inference we must pay attention to both the **evidence** put forth in the premises and to the **hypothesis** stated by the conclusion. It is not enough that the evidence is true; there must be enough of it, and it must be of the right sort. If the only evidence we have that all cats chase mice is the behavior of one feline, we are on shaky ground, whereas if we have observed 125,000 of them we can obviously speak with more confidence. However, the size alone of the evidence is not enough. Suppose a poll is taken to find out how Americans are going to vote in the next presidential election—whether for the Democratic or the Republican candidate—and that the pollsters ask 125,000 registered voters (a considerably larger number than polls usually deal with), so that the results should be highly reliable. If, however, the names of the 125,000 voters came from a list of campaign contributors to the Republican National Headquarters, the evidence, though more than enough in size, is of the wrong sort. It needs to be impartially representative.

There are also some requirements for the hypothesis, as the conclusion of an inductive argument is called. The hypothesis may be either a general statement of what purports to be a universal truth, for example, *All cats chase mice*, or it may be a particular statement that tries to account for a specific state of affairs, for instance, *In the next election fifty-four percent of the voters will cast their ballots for Senator Phogbound*. In either case the hypothesis must be consistent, adequate, simple, and testable. Being consistent means that it must contain no self-contradictions and that it must fit in with all of the other things we know or have reason to believe. Being adequate means that it must in fact account for the evidence that is used to support it. Being

simple means that it must not require us to make assumptions that are otherwise uncalled for. Being testable means there must be some way to disprove the hypothesis if it is wrong.

For example, suppose a man sitting indoors notices a sudden bright flash of light through the window, followed quickly by a loud rumbling, cracking noise. He reasons with himself, "There was a flash of light and a loud noise. What can it mean?" If he concludes, "The angels must be playing billiards," he will have reached a conclusion that is not consistent with what is known about billiards or with what theologians have written about angels. If instead he concludes, "Perhaps an airplane broke the sound barrier," he has accounted for the noise, but not the light, so the hypothesis is inadequate. On the other hand if he says, "Someone is playing a trick on me. They have rigged up a searchlight outside the window to make a flash and then have brought in a dump truck full of rocks, which they released to make the rumbling noise onto a platform of thin boards that split to make the cracking sound," he will have accounted for the evidence, but with Rube Goldberg ingenuity, postulating among other things a mysterious prankster who is otherwise quite unnecessary. If, however, he says, "It must have been lightning and thunder; perhaps there is going to be a storm," he has a consistent, adequate, and simple explanation, which moreover can be tested, since he can look for dark clouds or signs of wind or rain. If it should turn out to be a bright, sunny day, without a wisp of cloud in the sky, he will have to revise his conclusion and think again. But it will still have been a good tentative hypothesis, since it was testable.

When a consistent, adequate, and simple empirical hypothesis is tested and is not disproved by the tests, it is said to be confirmed and may then be called a **theory**. Or if the hypothesis is a generalization and has been extensively tested and confirmed, it may be referred to as a **law**. However, it is important to remember that hypotheses, theories, and laws, though well tested, remain always tentative statements of truth. The best established natural laws may be, and in the history of science sometimes have been, suddenly disproved. Truth turns out to be the most metaphysical of notions.

## Exercises

3. Identify the premises and the conclusion in each of the following arguments.
  1. Linus is going to be awake all night next Friday because it is Halloween, and he has stayed awake all night in the pumpkin patch every Halloween for the past five years.
  2. All wizards have supernatural powers, so Gandalf must, since he is a wizard too.



3. All Eskimos live in igloos, and since some of my best friends are Eskimos, some of them live in igloos.
  4. Most Eskimos like blubber, so Nanook, who is an Eskimo, will like it.
  5. Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Ham, and Drogo all like six good meals a day, and they are Hobbits, so all Hobbits like six meals a day.
  6. Snoopy could not have been a World War I flying ace because he is a beagle and none of them were beagles.
  7. Every member of Gamma Alpha Lambda has had an honor-point average above 3.85, and since Chloe has just been initiated, she will too.
  8. All freshmen have to live in the dorm, but Zelda does not, so she must not be a freshman after all.
4. Tell which of the arguments in the preceding exercise are deductive and which are inductive.
  5. Draw a valid conclusion from each set of premises.
    1. All engineers have to learn to use a slide rule.  
Dudley is going to be an engineer.
    2. All of the stars twinkle.  
The "evening star" does not twinkle.
    3. No cannibals are trustworthy.  
Some Melanesians are cannibals.
    4. Some animals make no sounds.  
All animals communicate with each other.
    5. Some students do not have beards.  
All students go to class.
  6. Suggest at least two different hypotheses to account for each set of evidence:
    1. It is two o'clock Saturday morning. You are alone in the house, the rest of the family having gone to visit relatives over the weekend. After watching the late show on television, you have checked the doors and gone to bed. You are drifting off to sleep when you hear what sounds like a door opening and shutting and the low murmur of voices.
    2. You are using an electric typewriter to do a term paper and have stopped to look up a fact in a large reference book. You push the machine to the back of the desk to make room for the book,



and when you pull it back to start typing, the machine suddenly stops working. It seems to have gone dead.

3. Someone has called you a word that sounded like /θàiriáetík/. Since you have never heard the word before, you do not know either its meaning or spelling. You look in your desk dictionary under *thiriatic*, *thyriatic*, *thireatic*, *thyrreatic*, and every other combination of those spellings you can think of without finding the word listed.
4. There is a horse named Hans that apparently can count by tapping out numbers—the tens with his right hoof and the units with his left. He also seems to add numbers like 25 and 35 and do much more complex arithmetic, such as multiplying the square root of 64 by the square root of 36, or even more complex calculations, such as finding the square root of the square root of 456,976 (that is, 26).\*
5. A man named Steeger rented a small house in the country, to which he moved with a pretty, young girl. After five days she disappeared and was never seen again. Steeger said she had gone to South America, but no one had seen her leave the house. The girl had closed out her sizable bank account when she moved to the country with Steeger, and after her disappearance he was discovered to have come into a large amount of money from an unexplained source. Steeger continued to live at the country house for several weeks, during which time his behavior was thought odd by the local inhabitants. They were at first suspicious of him because he was known to be a vegetarian by his purchases at the only store in the area, yet he also bought a large butcher's knife as well as an ax. Consequently, they watched him and discovered that the only time he left the house was to chop down the trees that grew around it. He felled the trees and then chopped them into short lengths and piled them up neatly, but never did anything with the logs. He spent most of the day at that exhausting and seemingly pointless work. The police suspected him of having done away with the girl, but were unable to find her body.†
7. Suggest a test that would disprove or help to confirm each hypothesis you put forward in the preceding exercise.

\*There were actually a number of such horses about the turn of the century in Elberfeld, Germany. They were widely studied and several hypotheses about them were advanced, but the phenomenon was never satisfactorily explained.

†This evidence is adapted from the short story by Lord Dunsany, "Two Bottles of Relish."

## HOW TO GO WRONG

If all arguments were as simple and straightforward as the ones we have been looking at, there would be little need for us to bother ourselves with the subject. But most real arguments lack neatness. They are very often incomplete in that they leave one or more of the premises unstated; even the conclusion is sometimes omitted, as though we had argued, "Pyewacket chases mice, so all cats probably do," leaving it to the reader to infer that Pyewacket is a cat; or "All cats chase mice, and Macavity is a cat," leaving unstated the conclusion that Macavity will chase them too. The technical name for such incomplete arguments is **enthymeme**, from a Greek word that means something held in the mind.

In addition to being incomplete many arguments are complex, involving a long series of conclusions, with earlier conclusions serving as premises for later ones like the links of a chain. Such a chain argument, known by the technical name **sorites**, has a final conclusion but also implies intermediate conclusions along the way. In the following example the intermediate conclusions, which would not normally be expressed, are put in parentheses.

Achilles was taught by Chiron.

Chiron was a centaur.

(Achilles was taught by a centaur.)

Centaur is half-horse and half-man.

(Achilles was taught by a half-horse, half-man creature.)

Any creature that is half-horse and half-man is mythological.

Therefore, Achilles' teacher was mythological.

Any lengthy argument is likely to be complex. But what makes arguments really difficult is the fact that they are frequently unclear. In such an argument it may be impossible to tell which statements are offered as evidence, how the statements support the conclusion, or even what conclusion is intended. The lack of clarity may be accidental, as in the letters to the editors of many newspapers, or it may be intentional if the arguer suspects that complete forthrightness would not serve his cause.

Incomplete, complex, unclear arguments are not the exception; they are the rule. The best place to find neat arguments is among the examples in a logic textbook. In those activities of life where argumentation is common, the messy argument is usual, for instance in advertising and in politics. The advertisement for one dishwashing liquid boasts, "Now it smells like lemon. Looks clear like lemon. But it's not lemon. . . . New and different. Cleans clear through to the shine—glasses gleam, silver glows, china sparkles bright. Try it." There is no stated argument, but the implication would seem to be

that a soap will wash dishes better if it smells and looks like lemon. It need not have any lemon in it. The falsity—and indeed irrelevancy—of the argument is apparent when it is isolated. To be effective, it needs to be slightly muddled. The decoration afforded by words like *clear*, *gleam*, *glow*, *sparkle*, and *bright* also serves to distract the reader's attention from the fact that lemon odor, whether natural or artificial, has no relation to cleansing power.

The kind of arguments used in advertising and in politics are often called propaganda. But it is not easy to say exactly what propaganda is. We usually think of it as something reprehensible involving distortions of fact, emotional appeals to prejudice, and callous selfishness. The word *propaganda* has suffered a real comedown. Originally used of missionary work, it referred to "propagating" or "increasing" religious faith. Those whose faith was being propagated did not always have a due sense of gratitude for the favor, and consequently the word began to degenerate. Now it usually has a negative association. If X is trying to persuade Y of something that is clearly to X's good, but that Y suspects not to be in his own best interest, Y may decide he is the victim of propaganda, even when the arguments are unemotional facts. If on the other hand Y decides that what he is being persuaded of is to his benefit, then the persuasion is not propaganda but education, however emotional it may be. The adult who is told by his physician to swallow some vile-tasting concoction will probably decide that the prescription is for his own good in the long run and will therefore regard himself as having been instructed by the doctor. But a child faced with the same medicine will look on all the lip-smacking and yum-yumming his parents can put on as sheer propaganda. Whether or not the advice is really in one's best interest is irrelevant—it is the thinking not that makes it propaganda.

For many people propaganda has sinister and conspiratorial associations, but there is nothing either very uncommon or fearful about it. All of us go through life exposed to what we might identify as propaganda if we had to call it something. From the lip-smacking that introduced us to ill-tasting medicines down to the commercial on last night's television, we are accustomed to being told what we should do and have consequently developed hard heads and thick skins. There is no reason to get excited or upset about propaganda, but it is good to be aware of it so we can look out for the all too common fuzzy argument and seductive appeal to illogic. Incomplete, complex, and unclear arguments are not necessarily propaganda or even wrong. They may support a true and worthwhile conclusion. But by their very nature they are hard to be sure of and thus lend themselves to weak or dishonest logic. The number of different fallacies, or ways to go wrong in an argument, are practically unlimited. No list could contain them all, but the remainder of this chapter will point out some of the more common ones, beginning with some errors that are due to insufficient evidence.

## Exercises

8. All of the following arguments are unsound. Where has each gone wrong—with a false premise or an invalid inference?
  1. Every English word is listed in the dictionary, but *ain't* is not in the dictionary. Consequently, *ain't* is not a word.
  2. The spelling *judgement* is wrong because the word is correctly spelled *judgment*, and there is only one right way to spell a word.
  3. Some patriotic Americans are rascals, but no foreign agents are patriotic Americans. So it is clear that some foreign agents are not rascals at all.
  4. The Black Muslims are opposed to integration, and so is the Ku Klux Klan. Consequently the Black Muslims and the Ku Klux Klan are the same.
  5. England is really a communist country, because it has a socialist government, and socialism is just another name for communism.
9. Each of the following arguments is an enthymeme. What are the implied propositions? They may be either premises or conclusions.
  1. Migrant workers are sometimes exploited by employers. Therefore, we must give them a better education.
  2. Senators are either statesmen who tend to the nation's business or windbags who waste their time on junkets. Has Senator Phogbound got back from the Bahamas yet?
  3. Charlie Brown is going to play baseball tomorrow. He will lose again.
  4. Some students are staging a demonstration at the President's office. They must need to work off some excess energy.
  5. Roscoe certainly is turning into a hippie. He hasn't cut his hair in three months.
10. Here is a chain argument (or sorites) with the final conclusion omitted. This is not an easy problem, but with a little patience you can find out what the conclusion should be. First compare statements 1 and 2 to determine whether Amos has short or long hair (you have to suppose that those are the only two possibilities). Then compare that conclusion with statement 3 to find out whether he is a poet, and so forth with each new conclusion and succeeding statement until you reach the end, when you will discover how Amos feels about mutton.‡

‡Adapted from a problem by Lewis Carroll, quoted in Kirk (above, note 1), p. 22.

1. Amos Judd has never been in prison.
  2. Men with short hair have all been in prison.
  3. No man with long hair can fail to be a poet.
  4. None but policemen on this beat are poets.
  5. All the policemen on this beat sup with our cook.
  6. None but her “cousins” ever sup with our cook.
  7. Our cook’s “cousins” all love cold mutton.
11. The following argument is unclear. State more clearly what seem to be the conclusion and the premises.

“Why do you so liberally quote the Constitution and Bill of Rights in your fight for civil rights and ignore the same source ‘the people’s right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed upon?’

“I imagine that your first rebuttal would be ‘times have changed.’ The same argument would hold true on civil rights and the urban problems.”§

## TOO LITTLE EVIDENCE

**(1) Hasty Generalization.** We have already seen that it is bad thinking to jump to a conclusion with too little evidence to go on, but hasty generalizations (as the results of such bad thinking are known) are relative; the less the evidence, the hastier the generalization. If we decide that all cats chase mice, we have probably overgeneralized somewhat because there are reports of cats that live, eat, sleep, and play with mice on the friendliest of terms. Yet since it is true that most cats do not act so benevolently, the most we are guilty of is ignoring the exception. It is more culpable to elevate the exception into a rule, as we would if we were to decide on the basis of knowing one cat raised by his master as a vegetarian that all cats are herbivorous. Both ignoring the exception and treating the exception as the rule are fallacies. The second is a bigger mistake, but the first may be more misleading in the long run, since subtle errors are harder to detect than gross ones.

**Stereotypes**, which are popular generalizations based on very little evidence, grow in our thinking like crabgrass in the suburbanite’s lawn. Frenchmen make great lovers, Italians have the best voices, Englishmen lack a sense of humor, and Orientals are inscrutable—to mention only a few stereotypes of nationality. We need to remind ourselves that a sizable number of French-

§Letter to the editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, August 8, 1968.



men are fat, balding, and more interested in their livers than in loving, that Italians can sing off key like the rest of us, that English authors and actors—not to mention members of the British government—have been among the greatest comics of Europe, and that we are just as inscrutable to the Oriental as he is to us. As a matter of fact, inscrutability, like beauty, is in the mind of the beholder. Stereotypes are the clichés of thought: we use them constantly but must take care not to be used by them.

The wisdom of the folk, which everyone learns at his mother's or, more often, granny's knee, consists mainly of sweeping generalizations that masquerade as profundities, often contradicting one another: Look before you leap, but he who hesitates is lost; absence makes the heart grow fonder, but out of sight, out of mind; a penny saved is a penny earned, but penny wise, pound foolish. **Folk wisdom** is wise because it has a generalization to cover every possible contingency and thus can never be caught without an appropriate conclusion. Its completeness, however, is at the price of consistency.

When a generalization is superficially plausible and powerfully attractive in its emotional associations, it is known as a **glittering generality**: *We live in the greatest nation in the world . . . the home of the brave and the free . . . God's country . . .* What is wrong with these statements is not that they are false, but that they are expressive rather than informative. They tell a great deal about the speaker's feelings but nothing whatever about his ostensible subject, the country in which he lives. The substitution of emotional purring for objective content is typical of the glittering generality. Traditional Fourth-of-July oratory glitters with pyrotechnic intensity, and as long as we accept it for what it is—an art form governed by strict rules—there is no reason we should not enjoy it. But when glittering generalities are introduced as evidence in a serious argument they become logical fallacies to be exposed, their fallacy lying in the fact that, though they pretend to be argument, they are not the kind of language that logic can cope with.

When a discussion is so interlarded with hasty generalizations that they become the main support of its argument, the result is **tabloid thinking**, named after the kind of condensed reporting found in some of the more sensational and less reliable newspapers. It concludes that a business-owner should not hire a man who was once in jail, since the leopard won't lose his spots, and you can't change human nature, and once a thief always a thief, and you can't trust a jailbird. When stereotypes, folk wisdom, and other such generalizations take the place of hard evidence, true argument gives way to tabloid thinking.

Some years ago the General Semanticists, a group whose often unsuccessful aim is to help people respond more intelligently to their surroundings and to one another by the critical use of words, suggested that we should add index numbers to general terms whenever we had to use them in talking about individuals. "A rose," said Gertrude Stein, "is a rose is a rose is a rose."



But  $\text{rose}_1$  (Dorothy Perkins: a rambler, hardy and vigorous, but a late bloomer) is not  $\text{rose}_2$  (Duchesse de Brabant: prolific and disease-resistant) is not  $\text{rose}_3$  (Louis Philippe: modest bloomer, but a good hedge) is not  $\text{rose}_4$  (Charlotte Armstrong: a hybrid meant for cutting, stands heat well), as any gardener knows. The danger in a general term such as *rose* or *Frenchman* is that by standing for what a lot of objects have in common, it will make us forget how different those objects may be in other respects. All Frenchmen have in common that they are citizens of France, but otherwise they are tall, short, fat, thin, handsome, homely, old, young, jolly, morose, lecherous, ascetic, flippant, sober, brilliant, stupid, saintly, villainous, offensive, likable, and a great many other contradictory things.  $\text{Frenchman}_1$  is not after all  $\text{Frenchman}_2$  in a great many very important respects. Although it is hardly practical to go around tacking subscript numbers onto every noun we use, the principle they stand for is a good one to remember: every individual has his unique identity, including characteristics that make him different from every other individual. General names tend to mask all those idiosyncrasies, but we should not forget them, because an intelligent response has to consider the uniqueness of the thing.

Moreover, unique individuals are evolving rather than changeless. An individual is thus not one thing but many different things at different times.  $\text{Chicago}_{2000}$  will be a far cry from  $\text{Chicago}_{1900}$ ,  $\text{Charles de Gaulle}_{1940}$  was very different from  $\text{Charles de Gaulle}_{1960}$ , and even today's rose is not quite the same as yesterday's. Most of us are not aware of how much we and those about us are changing, but meeting an old friend after years of separation can sometimes be a shock. We suddenly realize that  $\text{Roscoe Throckmorton}_{1960}$ , a swinging playboy in the night-town, is not  $\text{Roscoe Throckmorton}_{1970}$ , a hardware salesman with three kids and a mortgage. Subscript dates are no more practical than subscript index numbers, but in principle they too are useful as reminders that we can overgeneralize about a single individual as well as about a group. A statement beginning *You know good old Roscoe, he always . . .* will be true or false, depending on which Roscoe the speaker has in mind; it is unlikely to be true of both. If we forget that every proper name needs a date to make it complete, we will make hasty generalizations even about individuals.

The problem we face when we try to think clearly about generalizations and individuals is reflected in the task a child faces in learning to talk. When babies learn a language they seem to begin by overgeneralizing. The unique individual is not of much importance to a young child, who responds instead to very big generalizations. Thus, for one child any creature wearing trousers is "Daddy." For another, anything that goes on four legs is "Doggy," a term which may thus embrace what older children have learned to distinguish as squirrels, cats, and cows, as well as dogs. "Juice" is any liquid to drink

and "pants," any clothing. As the child grows older, he learns to compartmentalize, to distinguish, to recognize the uniqueness of things and events. The person who habitually responds to a class term like *Frenchman* as though all the members of the class were carbon copies of one another, who follows the lure of glittering generalities into tabloid thinking, and otherwise falls prey to hasty generalization is a case of logical arrested development. He may have become a wise child to the extent of knowing his own father, but to make it through logical adolescence, one must also learn that a rose is not a rose is not a rose after all.

**(2) False Causes.** Philosophers have had a great deal of trouble with causes. They have been bothered with questions like *How do we know when one thing is the cause of another? How do causes differ from conditions?* But even if we take a "common-sense" view and decide we know what causes are (the cause of Dudley's black eye was the punch Zelda gave him last night), we are still left with a number of logical problems. There is, for example, the distinction between **proximate** and **ulterior** causes. Thus, the proximate cause of a black eye is the rupture of small blood vessels and the injury of surrounding tissue, but beyond that there is the punch in the eye, and beyond that, there are presumably still more ulterior causes. Once we have started looking, we are likely to encounter an infinite regression of cause upon cause, like the fleas in the jingle:

Big fleas have little fleas  
 Upon their backs to bite 'em.  
 Little fleas have smaller fleas,  
 And so, ad infinitum.

Or like the old vaudeville routine that begins, "Rube, why are you lookin' so sad?" "I'm unhappy 'cause my dog died." "What happened to your dog?" "Oh, he got trampled when the horses stampeded. . . ." It turns out the horses stampeded because the barn caught fire when the house burned down from the candles at the funeral of his mother who had a heart attack when his wife ran away with the hired hand.

Causes need not be serial to be complex. If we ask what causes poverty in affluent America and want to know more than that some people do not earn enough money, we will probably hear talk about insufficient education and training, increasing automation, expanding birthrate, cultural deprivation, social prejudice, a changing economic base, and a great many other things. Probably there is no simple answer to most questions about causes, and to assume that there is, is to deceive ourselves. Causal relationships may even be reciprocal, with several things acting upon each other. For instance, U.S. Steel in announcing an increase of prices may explain that the rise has

been caused by an increase in wages, but the representative of the steelworkers' union will explain that the wage increase was unavoidable, since it was caused by increasing prices. Both may be right. When causes are very complex, we can easily be led to assume a causal relationship between things that happen to go together but are not cause and effect. Thus it is often supposed that poverty is the cause of crime, but that is too simple an explanation, since it ignores all the honest poor people in this world and all the criminal rich. The contrary assumption that poverty is the cause of nobility and that money corrupts is equally silly, but not so widely held nowadays.

Supposing that because things come one after another in time they must be cause and effect is known as the *post hoc fallacy* from the Latin *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* 'after this, therefore because of this.' The causes of the common cold were established in popular imagination when the first caveman went out without his rubbers, sat in a draft, overexerted himself, or got depressed. The poker-player who is dealt a royal flush while he is wearing a fez may never play cards bareheaded again. It seems to be human nature to look for causes and not to be overly particular about how they are found, because given any sequence of events, we will automatically suspect that there is some connection between them. If an arguer wants to suggest a causal relation by innuendo, all he need do is juxtapose facts, and his hearers will connect them. If we read in the newspaper that "the First National Bank is being audited by a commission from the Federal Reserve Board. Mr. Warbucks, the bank's president, has just left for an extended vacation in Rio de Janeiro," we are likely to draw some conclusions.

Assuming false causes or inadequate ones is really a variety of hasty generalization, but it is distinct and common enough to warrant separate mention.

**(3) Shifting the Burden.** A hasty generalization is based on too little evidence, but there is another logical error that is based on no evidence at all and is proud of it. This fallacy is traditionally called by a Latin name, *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, which might be freely translated as 'an argument based on an appeal to what we don't know.' Suppose Chloe and Zelda are having a discussion in which Chloe maintains that all Frenchmen are great lovers. Zelda suggests that this may not be the case, and Chloe responds, "Can you prove I'm wrong? If you can't, you'll have to admit I must be right." Chloe has attempted to shift the burden of proof to Zelda by suggesting that she establish the reverse of the disputed point. Of course, if Zelda has spent part of her junior year in Paris, Chloe may be in for trouble, but if Zelda is an unspoiled midwestern girl, Chloe's use of the *argumentum ad ignorantiam* may succeed. It would still be bad logic, since the fact that we are unable to prove one side of a question is no guarantee at all that the other side is correct.

**(4) The Big Lie.** The technique of the big lie came into its own during the Second World War as the mainstay of Nazi propaganda. The principle is a simple one: you can convince some people of anything, even without evidence, if you repeat it often enough with sincerity and confidence. In a less sinister form it is known as building esprit de corps, or being a booster. At the turn of the century the French psychologist Coué advocated a form of autosuggestion that involved repetition of the formula *Every day in every way I grow better and better*. The process may be psychologically effective, but it is logically faulty. The fallacy lies in supposing that the more often a statement is made, the more likely it is to be true.

**(5) Begging the Question.** There is another fallacy that has no real evidence but sneaks in as a premise the very conclusion that is to be established. It is called *petitio principii* or 'begging the question.' In its simplest form, question-begging is just a definition in disguise. For example, the argument *Shakespeare is the greatest playwright who ever lived because no one else has written drama that surpassed his* begs the question. All it really does is to define the term *greatest playwright* as meaning 'a writer of drama that no one has surpassed.' And that is not an argument, but an analytical proposition. The statement about Shakespeare remains without proof.

If the argument is somewhat more complex, so that the conclusion is separated from the question-begging assumption by at least one step, the fallacy may be called *arguing in a circle* or a *vicious circle*. Thus we might elaborate the previous argument: *Shakespeare must be the greatest playwright who ever lived because all reliable literary critics agree that he is. How do we know who the reliable literary critics are? Well, obviously any critic who doesn't recognize Shakespeare as the world's greatest playwright is not reliable.* The argument has come full circle, we are back where we started. The circle is called vicious because one meaning of that word is 'faulty,' an apt description of the circular argument. What the argument comes to is this: *Critics who say Shakespeare is great say Shakespeare is great, so if we believe them, he must be great.* The message is clear, but the information is minimal.

Name-calling, which will be discussed more fully later, can also be used to beg the question. If the district attorney refers to the defendant at trial as "this thieving, murderous criminal," he has begged the question the jury is meant to decide. We usually think of name-calling as derogatory, but speaking well can also be a form of question-begging, as in the question *Was the incomparable Shakespeare the greatest playwright the world has ever known?* Since *incomparable* means 'having no equal or better,' the question contains its own answer.

Begging the question is a form of talking in which we seem to be arguing for some conclusion but are merely repeating the same idea in different words. Thus our conclusion rests on no evidence whatever.

### Exercise

12. Below are some fallacies that result from too little or no evidence. Identify the fallacy in each argument. (Here and in the rest of the exercises, the truth of the conclusion is irrelevant. We are concerned only with the validity of the argument.)
1. Eighteen-year-olds should not be given the vote. Look at that idiot Goober—he's eighteen. Do you want people like him choosing the government?
  2. She can't be Russian. She looks like a fashion model, but all Russian women are stocky with big muscles and thick ankles from all that farm work they do.
  3. He must be a bachelor. After all, he's a traveling salesman, and you know a rolling stone gathers no moss.
  4. Our colleges prepare fine, upstanding young people to take their place in our great American democracy by giving them a wholesome, healthy, and sober environment in which to pursue knowledge. The hallowed halls of learning must not be poisoned with liquor. Support prohibition.
  5. The widespread practice of birth control in Scandinavia has led to a disregard of the value of human life to be seen in the high suicide rate of those countries.
  6. The Federal courts began letting pornography like *Ulysses* and *Fanny Hill* get published, and as a result we have more people arrested for sex crimes than ever before.
  7. Certainly eighteen-year-olds should be given the vote. What reason is there for withholding it?
  8. All towns should permit the sale of liquor because the prohibition of alcohol is not advisable.
  9. No animal has language. Therefore the communication of the bee, however complex, is not language, nor is the chatter of a monkey, the bark of a dog, or the mimicry of a parrot. Since none of these creatures have language, we see that man alone talks.
  10. The question we must consider is whether education will best be served by an intellectually stifling censorship or by an instructive exchange of ideas.

### EVIDENCE OF THE WRONG SORT

As well as being too little, evidence may be of the wrong kind. The next group of fallacies all rest on evidence of poor quality.



**(6) Pressing an Analogy.** When we are trying to illustrate or explain a difficult matter, we may liken it to some parallel and usually less complex state of affairs, that is to say, we draw an analogy. For example, we can say that language is like a game of chess since both have two kinds of rules. A language has grammatical rules, which are like the rules of play describing what moves are possible for each chess piece. A language also has usage and stylistic rules that are like the strategies of chess. If you want to play chess at all you have to follow the rules of the game, but if you want to play winning chess you need also to observe the appropriate strategies. So with language, if you want to speak English at all you have to follow grammatical rules, but if you want to speak it effectively, you need also to observe the various rules of usage and style.

Using an analogy to illustrate or to help explain is one legitimate use. Another is to suggest new aspects of a dimly understood subject that might otherwise be overlooked. Thus physicists have discovered that in some ways light is like waves in water or in air. Consequently, they may wonder in how many different ways the two are alike, and since we understand waves better than we do light, the physicist may take something he knows to be true of wave motion and postulate that it might be true of light also. An analogy used in this way aids in the formation of hypotheses and stimulates our guessing ability.

An analogy never proves anything. It only illustrates or suggests. And it is always between things that are partly alike and partly unlike. If we forget those simple truths, we may begin to assume that two things alike in some ways must necessarily be alike in others. Then we are using the analogy as proof and thereby creating a logical fallacy. Anyone who supposes that because the rules for chess are clear, well defined, and can be looked up in a book, grammar rules must also be indisputable and available for looking up will have pressed the analogy too far. Similarly, a physicist who decides that because light is in some respects wavelike, there must be a substance that spreads through interstellar space, penetrates every vacuum, and is the stuff that light is waves in will have pressed the analogy too far. Because of the analogy with waves, physicists once thought that there might be such a substance and gave it the name *ether*, but experiments convinced them that ether was a fiction, so they abandoned the idea. If instead they had continued to insist light is wavelike, and waves have to be waves in some stuff, so ether must exist, they would have been trapped by their analogy.

**(7) Card-Stacking.** A cardplayer who wants to be sure of winning may take the precaution of arranging the deck ahead of time so he will be dealt an unbeatable hand. Something similar can happen in logic. An argument that chooses as evidence only those facts that support its conclusion and hides those that might challenge it is stacking the cards. When Senator Phogbound, who is trying to be renominated, gleefully announces that a poll taken last



weekend shows him a nine-to-one favorite for election, but neglects to mention that the poll was taken at the annual Phogbound Family Picnic, he has stacked the cards. The professional card-stacker does not lie outright, for he has no need to. What he says is the literal truth, but he manages to imply a great deal more that may not be true at all. Thus, Senator Phogbound's opposition, Mr. O'Malley, may boast, "I'm a winner. I've never lost an election, so you'd better choose me to run in November." The statements imply that O'Malley is the darling of the voters and can be expected to sweep into office on the huzzas of a delighted electorate. But before accepting that conclusion we had better know what elections Mr. O'Malley has been in (Sergeant-at-Arms for the PTA), how many people voted in the election and what the margin of victory was (15, 8 to 7), who the opposition was (a little old lady in a wheel chair), and many other relevant matters.

There are several specialized forms of card-stacking, such as **quoting out of context**. For instance, an advertisement for a movie might quote the reviews selectively:

*The Reluctant Virgin* is another triumph . . . unsurpassed . . . Dolly Dimples has a talent that is rare . . . Rod Ramm shows the acting ability of a giant . . . Don't miss this film . . .

Put that way, the review sounds like a rave, but suppose the ellipses were actually filled in like this:

*The Reluctant Virgin* is another triumph in Hollywood's quest to unite bad taste with dullness. It is unsurpassed in mawkishness and triviality. Dolly Dimples has a talent that is rare, which is at least one cause for gratitude. As her costar, Rod Ramm shows the acting ability of a giant clam. Don't miss this film if you have a bad case of insomnia to cure.

To be sure, quotations are not usually distorted quite so much, but it is not uncommon for a quotation to omit some significant qualifying statement, thus changing the tentative into the certain.

Another form of card-stacking is the **loaded question** containing an unwarranted assumption, the have-you-stopped-beating-your-wife-yet sort of question. Still another is the **self-contradiction**, as seen in puzzles like *Can God make a yardstick longer than a yard?* If he can, it is not a yardstick any longer; but if he cannot, he is not all-powerful. Still another is speculating about the consequences of something that is not the case, for instance *What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable body?* Since we know of no such forces or bodies, the question is not relevant to anything. Paradoxes like the last two examples are created by card-stacking since we deliberately choose incompatible or irrelevant premises and then pretend surprise at our inability to find a reasonable conclusion. A final form of card-stacking is **wishful thinking**, in which we begin by saying that it would be pleasant if something were the case and end by concluding that it must therefore be so.

**(8) Name-Calling.** When two persons are arguing on different sides of a question, one of them may find it a great deal easier to attack his opponent than to discuss the issues. Substituting invective for reasoned debate is known by the Latin name of *argumentum ad hominem*, that is, an argument directed at a man, rather than at an issue. Serious politics on all levels—from the local community to the international scene—abounds with name-calling. To the Chinese Communist, an American is not just an American, he is a war-mongering, money-worshipping, neo-imperialist exploiter of the masses. And we return the favor by calling him an anarchical, atheistic, oppressive terrorizer of the innocent. By such language he thinks he has vindicated communism; and we, the American Way.

Name-calling can also consist of innuendo rather than invective, as when the politician affirms, “*I will refuse to engage in mud-slinging in this campaign,*” thus implying without actually saying that his opponent is not so high-minded. A grosser example is afforded by an actual politician who is supposed to have won his seat in Congress by vilifying the incumbent throughout the hinterlands of their home state. Among the charges that shocked the rural crowds were that the incumbent was an extrovert, had practiced pedagogy at one time, and was reputed to have engaged in nepotism with his sister, known in Washington as a thespian. This character assassination by clang association was successful, and after long public service the assassin retired, full of years and honor.

The basic fallacy in most name-calling is the supposition that the worth of an idea depends on the worth of the person who advances it. Thus we encounter an argument like this one: *You can't be in favor of that bill; don't you know Senator Phogbound has endorsed it? And he was censured last year for taking his family to Europe as part of his staff.* Now, however scarlet Senator Phogbound's sins, any bill he supports must still be judged on its own merits. Of course, if the bill is to allow members of Congress to double their staffs while in Europe, the Senator's past actions may be relevant; but if it is a bill to control the sale of firearms, his professional ethics are probably irrelevant.

A special kind of name-calling has been described as **poisoning the well**. It involves the suggestion that one of the parties in a debate cannot be trusted or that the only available source of information is faulty, for example, *The Russians claim to have increased their wheat production, but Communists believe that some things are more important than truth, don't they?* By calling into question the general truthfulness of the Russians, we make it impossible to accept with confidence any statement they make. The well has been poisoned; no one will ever again feel safe with its water.

**(9) Emotional Appeal.** Any fallacy can have emotions involved in it. Name-calling, for instance, usually does. But there are several arguments that have an emotional appeal at their very root. They are known as *ad captandum*

*vulgus* arguments, which means ‘to catch the crowd,’ on the pessimistic assumption that the only way to convince the majority of men is to appeal to their unreason. The first of these is the **bandwagon**, with a name borrowed from politics, where the technique is particularly common. One such argument is *O'Malley is sure to win, so support him now and be on the winning side. Climb on the bandwagon!* Relying on the old adage that nothing succeeds like success, the bandwagon technique appeals to every man's desire to come out on top, to be the one who rides on the bandwagon as it rolls down Main Street. In addition to the major role the device has played in political conventions, it appears also in advertising: *Laco Cola is the favorite soft drink of Americans today, Everybody likes Lubby's, Don't be the last one on your block to own a Schwintzer.*

Another *ad captandum* device is known as **identification** or **plain folks**. The speaker typically presents himself as just one of the boys—an ordinary fellow like you or me. Since it is human nature to be suspicious of the stranger, the speaker tries to convince us that he is one of us, with the same outlook and interests we have. In the process the corn can grow pretty tall, but the appeal need not be a homely one. Advertisements in the *New Yorker* magazine, for instance, are likely to assume a cool sophistication. However, since on the whole there are more plain folks than there are suave cosmopolites, the identifier usually aims at the big market. Governor Wallace of Alabama campaigned for the presidency by announcing himself as “a former truck driver who married a former dime store clerk and whose father was a plain dirt farmer,” thus solidly establishing his credentials as plain folks. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who could hardly claim such distinctions, had to be satisfied with beginning his radio “fireside chats” to the nation with a confidence-inspiring “My friends . . .”

The plain-folks technique is really a special case of the emotional appeal called **association**, by which the arguer tries to connect the thing he is promoting with situations to which most of us have strongly favorable responses, or the thing he is undermining with situations that evoke negative responses. For instance, a brewer who feared that his product lacked class might give it a name that suggested *champagne* and buy advertisements that show elegantly attired women sipping it in the company of dinner-jacketed men amidst candlelight and opulence. Even though the reader does not own a dinner jacket and uses candles only when a fuse blows, he can still sip that beer and feel part of the *haut monde*—or at least the brewer hopes so.

On the other hand, guilt by association is equally common. A southern politician remarked about an opponent whom he regarded as a liberal left-winger, “If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and hangs around with a lot of ducks, it must be a duck.” The remark is more than just a variation on the proverbial “Birds of a feather flock together,” though that is its moral. The duck is a queer bird, something of a clown

that invites patronizing, so the implicit association was with comical insignificance. A classic example of guilt by association appeared in the presidential campaign between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater, when much of Johnson's campaign was based on the idea that Goldwater was impetuous and might lead the nation into war. A television spot showed a little girl playing in a field of flowers; it was a clear spring day, sun shining, breeze blowing. That view was replaced by a shot of a mushroom-shaped cloud filling the sky. And then came the message: "Vote for Lyndon Johnson." The implied alternative was clear, and its associations were apparently convincing.

The number of ways of appealing to the emotions seems unlimited. We can point with pride, view with alarm, tug at the heart strings, arouse to wrath, stir the soul, and set the pulses beating. But in every case the *ad captandum* argument counts on certain automatic or stock responses of an emotional nature to ideas like mother, apple pie, Old Glory, free enterprise, Valley Forge, communism, atheism, creeping socialism, the Kremlin, death, war, Black Power, riots, hippies, protests, civil rights, or law and order. On a simple preintellectual level, all things are either good or bad. The emotional appeal never rises above that.

**(10) Misusing Authorities.** If all of us were able to speak only about things we know from first-hand experience, the world would be a great deal quieter than it is. Human society, as we know it, would be impossible because a very large amount of what we "know" is information we have accepted from others whose authority we respect. Consequently, the use of authorities to support an argument is perfectly legitimate, provided they are used correctly to establish the truth of a factual matter or an interpretation that lies within the competence of the authority. But whatever is used can be abused.

A frequent abuse is citing an irrelevant authority, such as some famous person whose name is prestigious but who is not especially knowledgeable about the subject under consideration. If we are discussing contemporary art, the opinions of Dwight Eisenhower or Winston Churchill are of no more importance than those of somebody's Uncle Clarence, who was a Sunday-painter too. When it comes to foreign policy, the opinions of a famous baby doctor are not automatically better than those of an obscure barber. Who is the better authority depends on who has the more detailed knowledge. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, that one branch of the government employing a great many specialists to give advice in recondite fields lists in its organizational chart, along with the other experts, several positions to be filled by "general specialists." Presumably the general specialist is called on to give authoritative advice on any subject that does not fall in the province of other available specialists. Such an all-purpose authority would seem to make mere "special specialists" unnecessary.

A technique frequently used in everyday argument is the citation of vague authority: *Everybody knows that . . . ; All the experts say . . . ; Nine out of ten doctors agree . . . ; A survey by an independent foundation has revealed that . . .* Unless we know exactly who is being cited we cannot judge his claims to authority, for vagueness can easily disguise the pseudo authority. For example, there is the television commercial that begins with a man in a white coat, who sits behind a desk in an antiseptic-looking office and has a stethoscope hanging casually about his neck. He begins, "Recent tests have shown that . . ." and proceeds to extol the virtues of some patent medicine. Anyone who stops to think about it will be reasonably sure that the man is an actor dressed up to look like a doctor. What the advertiser is counting on is that the viewer will not think at all but will merely remember what was recommended by that nice "doctor," who probably looks and sounds more authentic than a real doctor.

A kind of authority frequently found in advertising is the testimonial, for example: *Just listen to what Mrs. Sheldon Tweedsmuir of Hackensack, New Jersey, has to say about New Flood Laundry Preparation . . .* The testifier does not lay claim to any special authority; he is just "plain folks" who wants to tell you how he feels about soap, headache powders, or artificial orange juice. The testimonial is by no means limited to commercial use; some of the churches in the United States include it regularly in their services. Thus doubly hallowed by faith and profit, the testimonial would seem to be the ideal form of authority in a democratic society.

A subtler appeal to authority than any of those we have so far discussed is the use of jargon, or highly technical terminology, to impress those who do not understand it. It is language often used for its authoritative value. We may assume that words we do not understand must be very deep indeed and that the one who uses them must be a wise man, whose authority is to be respected. The label from a bar of soap proudly announces that it contains "Hexachlorophene and 3, 4, 4'-Trichlorocarbanilide." Most of us have not the faintest notion of what all that means, but the unpronounceability of the words gives us the feeling that those soap-makers know what they are about and that we are being well looked after. The chemicals in the soap are almost as impressive-sounding as the ingredients in some breakfast cereals.

Of course, every technical subject has its own terminology or jargon—the cotyledons of botany, the morphemes of grammar, the valences of chemistry, the dactyls of poetry, the impedance of physics. Much of the work in learning any new subject is acquiring the lingo. Such acquisition involves more than just memorizing names, however. We must also learn the concepts they symbolize and how to manipulate the symbols appropriately. When we are dealing with technical matters, technical jargon is inevitable, and as long



as it is used among those who understand it, it can save time and improve accuracy in communication. But when used only to establish authority, it is misused.

**(11) The Big Stick.** One fallacy, known by the Latin name of *ad baculum*, or an appeal ‘to the stick,’ is hardly an argument at all. It is a threat to use force when logic fails, as in Samuel Butler’s verses on those who

. . . prove their doctrine orthodox,  
By apostolic blows and knocks.

When Russia was carrying on negotiations with the Czech government in an attempt to convince them of the necessity for more control by the Communist party over the national life, the Russian army carried on tank maneuvers just beyond the Czech border. The *ad baculum* argument was probably never mentioned by the negotiators, but it was clearly in evidence. The technique was also described by Theodore Roosevelt: “Speak softly and carry a big stick.”

### Exercise

13. The following arguments rely on evidence of the wrong sort. Identify the fallacy in each.
  1. Teachers’ unions and strikes are wrong. A minister does not strike against his congregation, a lawyer against his clients, or a doctor against his patients. Why should teachers be allowed to strike against their pupils?
  2. The Republicans are clearly the best party. They gave us Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, whereas the Democrats have been in office during two world wars and the worst depression this nation has ever known.
  3. Jesus was no peacenik. See Matthew 13:34, where he says, “I came not to send peace, but a sword.”
  4. Can you explain the fact that the leaders of the Democratic party have been so much greater as statesmen than any of the Republicans?
  5. An open-housing law has been supported by Gus Hall, the notorious chairman of the Communist party in the U.S.A. No loyal American can join in a Communist project like that.
  6. All your friends are discovering the new Army. Don’t be left behind. Come on and join the big swing to the good guys in the U.S. Army.

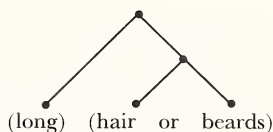
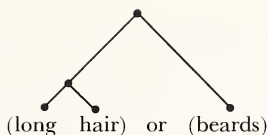


7. Hello there, neighbors, this is Samuel O'Malley—just call me Sam. You and I know that a bunch of bigwigs up in Washington have had things pretty much their own way for a long time, but now's our chance to do something about it. You elect me and we'll clean up that mess.
8. Decent, respectable, law-abiding citizens cannot be expected to tolerate the revolting conduct of these hippie tramps that live in nauseating filth and so infest the country that we fear to let our innocent little children out of our sight.
9. Stop the fluoridation of our drinking water. Do you know what fluoride is? It is a compound of fluorine—a binary compound. And do you know what fluorine is? It is a *halogen* element. In its normal state it is a greenish-yellow, poisonous gas that is *extremely reactive*. Do you want that in your water?
10. Of course we should abolish capital punishment. The New York *Times* had a full-page petition calling for an end to the death penalty, signed by some of the nation's leading actors, authors, scientists, and other such prominent men and women.

## MUDDLED WORDS

In some poor arguments the fallacy lies not in the evidence, but in the fact that words can be interpreted in more ways than one. When language gets muddled, an argument is sure to go wrong.

**(12) Ambiguity.** An expression that can be understood in more than one way is ambiguous. There are, however, various kinds of ambiguity. It may arise because two different words are pronounced alike (homonymy), as with the hippies who cancelled their scheduled love-in at Bare Beach after they discovered the place was really named Bear Beach. Or ambiguity may come from one word having several meanings (polysemy); for instance, someone that feeds cats may be either a little old lady from next door or a lion-tamer at the circus. But ambiguity does not have to be lexical; it can be purely grammatical and is then known technically as **amphiboly**. For instance, the Dean of Men makes a rule saying, "Male students may not have long hair or beards." The rule is ambiguous; though the meaning of each of the words taken separately is clear, the grammar that joins them is not. The prohibition might be against beards and long hair, or against long hair and long beards, depending on how the noun phrase is structured:



The dean's rule is muddled, and before the activist students on campus stage a sit-in at his office, they should try to find out the grammar of the rule. Purely grammatical ambiguity, however, is less common than either lexical ambiguity or a mixture of the two.

When a word with more than one meaning is used in such a way that it changes its sense in the middle of an argument, we have the common fallacy known as **equivocation**. The word *grammar* has several meanings. It may refer to the structure of a language, which is the way morphemes combine to make up utterances, or it may refer to a particular description of that structure. Now look at this argument:

Each language has a single grammar that is its characteristic and unique structure. If there are two distinct grammars, then we are dealing with two distinct, though possibly similar, languages. But traditional grammar and modern grammar are very different from one another. They cannot both be right if they are of the same language. At least one of them, and maybe both, must be wrong.

The conclusion does not follow, because the argument equivocates with the word *grammar*. In the first two instances, it means 'structure'; in the second two, 'description.' The argument will seem convincing only if we fail to notice that the first half and the last half are talking about quite different things.

Sometimes a word is ambiguous, not because it offers two sharply contrasting senses, but because it is broad or vague in its reference. The word *dog* can be applied to anything from a Chihuahua to a Saint Bernard, from an English bull to a Russian wolfhound, from a Pekingese to a German shepherd—all within a single meaning. Its referents can be so significantly different from one another that the term is very broad indeed. Abstract words like *freedom* illustrate vagueness of reference. The strong emotional content of that word makes it suitable for expressive and evocative use, but its reference is unclear. Before we can talk about "freedom" in a cognitively meaningful way, we must ask "Freedom from what constraints, to act in what way?" "Freedom Now!" makes a fine rallying cry, but unless we get a good deal more specific, its only meaning is an emotional one. If we forget that no man can be just plain free, he has to be free from something or to do something, we will begin to treat the word *freedom* as though it named a specific, individual thing rather than an abstract relationship between things.

The jargon for this error is **hypostatization** or **reification**, but both words just mean acting as though an abstraction were a thing. Vagueness of reference can be found in more concrete words also. For example, Auntie Maud's cottage cheese is advertised as "12 percent richer." That sounds good, but unless we know richer in what respects and richer than what, it means very little.

Chapter 6 noted that there are fundamentally two ways a word acquires meaning—by custom and by stipulation—and that theoretically any meaning can be stipulated for any word. Stipulating meanings can, however, be dangerous because it increases the chance of ambiguity. If a word is used in a private, esoteric meaning without due warning having been given, it is said to have a **Pickwickian sense**, after the hero of Charles Dickens's novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. During a lively meeting of the Pickwick Club, Mr. Blotton so far forgot himself as to call Mr. Pickwick a humbug, but then hastened to explain:

Mr. Blotton had no hesitation in saying that he . . . had used the word in its Pickwickian sense. (Hear, hear.) He was bound to acknowledge that, personally, he entertained the highest regard and esteem for the honourable gentleman; he had merely considered him a humbug in a Pickwickian point of view. (Hear, hear.)

The problem with a Pickwickian sense is that whatever meaning may be stipulated, the word is likely to carry along its old emotional associations. Mr. Blotton never did explain the Pickwickian sense of *humbug*, probably because it was just a dodge to get out of the argument, but its non-Pickwickian associations nearly caused a brawl. To change the sense of a word without changing its associations is also known as **persuasive definition**, a covert and illegitimate argument.

Something similar has happened with the word **nonsense** as it is used by some modern logicians, who may stipulate for it either of two meanings: 'whatever cannot be expressed in the logical system being used' or 'a statement that cannot be confirmed by appeal to sense perception.' The stipulated meaning should have no emotional value. But even the most conscientious effort can hardly erase from the word its associations of absurdity, triviality, frivolity, and foolishness. To call a man a humbug and his statements nonsense is invariably to be insulting, Pickwickian sense and stipulated meaning or no.

Finally, there is the **etymological fallacy**, which supposes that the true or real meaning of a word is revealed by its history. We have seen this error before, so it will be enough here to give an example or two. There is the argument holding that coats are not manufactured, since *manufactured* means 'made by hand' and nowadays coats are put together with a machine. Another such argument states that cargo cannot be shipped by train, since *ship* means

‘transport by water’; by that logic, however, cargo could not be sent on a ship either, since *cargo* comes ultimately from a Latin word meaning ‘wagon.’ The etymological argument is sometimes used by people with a little learning who want to pretend that history never happened. But they never have knowledge enough or courage to be consistent. If such an etymologophile were to use each of his words in its earliest known and hence presumably “true” sense, he would speak perfect Pickwickese, an esoteric language that no one else could understand.

### Exercise

14. The arguments below are muddled because of an ambiguity in each. Locate it.
1. What do you mean “stale pecan pie”? This is fresh pecan pie. I gathered the nuts and cracked them myself a week ago last Monday, just before the pie was baked. How much fresher could they be?
  2. There is no need for teachers to prepare for their work by studying English, mathematics, history, or botany in college. They should not worry about teaching those subjects, because they do not teach subjects, they teach children.
  3. Bachelorhood involves never having any children, so eventually bachelorhood will be extinct.
  4. Birth control is absolutely necessary all over the world. We must have adequate hospitals and equipment for emergencies, enough trained doctors or midwives, good prenatal care, and instruction for the prospective mother to teach her about baby-care. Then we will have real control over birth.
  5. *Draft* really means ‘draw,’ so the only proper way to draft men for the army is by drawing lots.

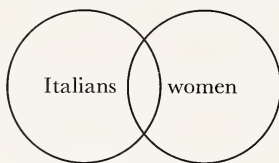
### WRONG INFERENCE

In addition to having enough evidence of the right sort and clear, unambiguous use of words, an argument must also reach its conclusion by correct inference.

**(13) Non Sequitur.** When a conclusion does not follow logically from the evidence on which it is supposed to be based, it is a non sequitur. Although in a broad sense a non sequitur is any wrong inference, there is one error

in thinking that is a prime example of the fallacy. We can best approach it by looking first at a similar, but valid inference.

If we know that some Italians are women, we can conclude that some women are Italians. We will certainly be right. Any statement that is a **particular affirmative** with the form *Some X are Y* (see above, pp. 268–69) can be simply converted, so that it becomes *Some Y are X*. All that is needed is to switch the terms around. If the original statement was true, its conversion will be too. A diagram will illustrate this state of affairs:



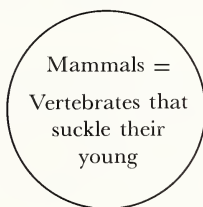
If we let the circle on the left represent Italians and the circle on the right women, we can see from the overlapping area that *Some Italians are women* and *Some women are Italians* are equally true. Either of these statements implies the other, and so also *Some second-story men are fathers* implies *Some fathers are second-story men*; *Some doves symbolize peace* implies *Some symbols of peace are doves*; and *Some swimmers use earplugs* implies *Some people that use earplugs swim*. The slight change in wording is not significant. It is not even necessary that we know the meaning of the terms; if we are told that some reredoses are triptychs, we can be sure that some triptychs are reredoses, even if we have never heard of a reredos or a triptych before. It is the form of the statement and not the meaning of the terms that guarantees its convertibility.

Now, suppose we take a **universal affirmative** with the form *All X are Y* and try to make the same simple conversion of its terms. If from *All Amazons are women* we infer *All women are Amazons*, we will be wrong—the conclusion is a non sequitur. Statements with *all* have different implications from those with *some*, as we can see by comparing the following diagram with the earlier one:



Here the circle for Amazons is entirely within that for women, indicating that if anyone is an Amazon, she is also a woman. The converse is clearly not true—there are women who are not Amazons. The only converse inference we can make from a universal affirmative like *All Amazons are women* is the particular affirmative *Some women are Amazons*. So also *All second-story men are criminals* is true, but its simple converse would be *All criminals are second-story men*, which is false. Instead of being second-story men, some criminals are shoplifters, pickpockets, counterfeiters, kidnappers, or holdup men. The most we can say is *Some criminals are second-story men*.

When occasionally we do come across an *all* statement whose simple conversion is also true, we have found a definition, for example *All mammals are vertebrates that suckle their young* and *All vertebrates that suckle their young are mammals*. In this case it is the meaning of the terms and not the form of the statement that allows us to switch them. For such definitions the circles overlap completely:



We have merely two terms for the same thing, making the statement a tautology.

The fallacy of the non sequitur is common. It can be seen in assumptions that are made often, though usually not explicitly, such as *If all alcoholics are drinkers, all drinkers are alcoholics*, *If all Communists are opposed to the U.S. in Southeast Asia, everyone opposed to the U.S. in Southeast Asia is a Communist*, and *If all that is good for you seems unpleasant, all that seems unpleasant is good for you*.

**(14) Undistributed Middle.** Derived from the non sequiturs we have been examining is the fallacy of the undistributed middle, seen in such arguments as *The NAACP is supporting demonstrations and civil disobedience, and that is just what the Communists do, so it is clearly a Communist-directed organization*. It is only because of the emotional issues involved that this argument is accepted by people who would unhesitatingly reject a completely parallel line of reasoning: *Zelda is entering beauty contests, and that is what Chloe is doing too, so it is clear that Chloe is giving orders to Zelda*. The conclusion,



far from being clear, is obviously a non sequitur; in fact, if Zelda and Chloe are competing in the same contests for the same prizes it is unlikely that either is taking orders from the other. The error in this fallacy is that the **middle term**, the thing the NAACP and the Communists have in common, namely, supporting demonstrations, is wrongly taken as equivalent to being a Communist or Communist-directed. The assumption has been made that if all Communists support demonstrations, all who support demonstrations are Communists, a classic non sequitur.

There are several varieties of the undistributed middle fallacy; we will illustrate with just one more: *Zelda is just dating football players, and since Lance Armstrong is the captain of the team, she must be dating him.* The conclusion would follow only if we knew that Zelda was dating not just some but all of the football players. Making the middle term refer to all rather than only some of the things it names is called **distributing the middle**, and when the conclusion requires a distributed middle and the premises contain only an undistributed middle, we have the fallacy so named.

**(15) Part and Whole.** Another mistake in inference is supposing that what is true of the parts of a whole when they are taken separately will also be true of the whole when it is taken as a unit. Extreme examples of this fallacy are obvious. No one should be deceived by the argument *All men lose their hair eventually, so mankind is becoming bald.* However, a slightly different form of the same argument—namely, that by studying how a child learns to speak we can discover how human beings first acquired language—has been given serious consideration under the assumption that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, which is to say that when an individual develops, he goes through the same stages that the whole race went through in its evolution. There is no logical reason why that idea should be so, nor is there any very good empirical evidence for it, but it is a tenacious notion and continues to pop up from time to time.

The opposite argument is also a fallacy, namely that what is true of the whole must also be true of the parts taken individually. *The American Indian is vanishing. Since Joe Bearclaw is an American Indian, he must be vanishing.* Put that way, the argument is obviously absurd. But when it comes to statistics about a group, we may have trouble remembering that the figures tell nothing certain about any individual member of the group. The fact that women live longer than men does not guarantee that Zelda will outlast Dudley; the fact that college graduates earn more money than those who have only a high school diploma does not mean that O'Malley will outearn Murphy. A great many individual factors can affect particular cases—Zelda and Dudley's health for instance, or O'Malley and Murphy's relative degree of avarice.

**(16) Diversions: Red Herrings and Straw Men.** Sometimes a main road will have pleasant or curious looking bypaths that invite the traveler to wander off the straightest route to his destination. As long as he is not in a hurry to get anywhere and the danger of getting lost is not great, the side trip can be rewarding. In argumentation, however, the reasoner is usually trying to reach a conclusion by the shortest and most reliable way; logical bypaths not only waste time but they are likely to be so confusing that the main line of the argument is lost forever. In everyday use *diversion* can mean either 'amusement' or 'deviation'; in logic it is always the latter. When an argument is diverted from its proper conclusion and wanders off to prove some side issue or irrelevant question, we have the fallacy also known by the Latin term *ignoratio elenchi* or 'ignorance of the argument.' Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees" (the one that begins "I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree") is often used as an example of a bad poem. Suppose someone were to argue that it is really a very good poem because trees are, when you stop to think about them, remarkably complex and wonderful things that are both beautiful and useful to man. Of course we often take them for granted, but it would be hard to get along without them—look at the trouble they have in Iceland, where there are no trees. And what is more sublime than a tree silhouetted against a red and gold sunset? Such an argument might establish the fact that trees are good—both aesthetically and practically—but it would say nothing at all about the poem "Trees," because the goodness of the subject is unrelated to the goodness of the poem. Of course our imaginary "Trees" fan might counter that when he talked about a "good poem" he meant a poem on a good subject, but that would be a Pickwickian response, since some very dull poems indeed have been written about good subjects.

When a diversion is deliberately introduced to distract attention and confuse the argument, it may be called a **red herring** because such a smoked fish has sometimes been used to confuse hunting dogs by pulling it across the trail of their quarry, thus destroying the scent. When Senator Phogbound is questioned about his junkets to Europe with his family going as official staff members and he responds by reminding the questioner of the dangers of imperialistic communism abroad and creeping socialism at home, he is using a red herring.

If someone is arguing a point, he may invent an opponent or opposing argument to use in contrast to his own position, but he is likely to make the imaginary opposition weak enough to be easily knocked down. A fictitious and easily refuted counterargument is known as a **straw man**, perhaps because it is for the birds. The straw man diverts attention from evidence for a proposition to evidence against a weak opposing view. Our imaginary "Trees" defender is a typical example of a straw man, or at least he would have been if we had intended him to prove, rather than merely illustrate, a point.

**(17) Either/Or.** If you have ever played a word-association game in which you try to make your partner say a particular word by giving him one-word clues, you will know that antonyms are often successful. If you want him to say “short,” the best clue you can give is “tall”; or if he is supposed to say “day,” an excellent clue is “night.” There seems to be something about the human mind that inclines it to deal in opposites.

We may even find it hard to remember that opposites do not necessarily exhaust all the possibilities and are sometimes quite vague in their reference. Everybody would agree that a man who is four feet, six inches is short by most standards and that one who is seven feet is tall. But what about the man who is five-nine or five-eleven—is he tall or short? We say that two things are as different as day and night, but at what moment in the twilight does day change into night? At dusk there is a time, albeit brief, when the two are not so different after all. If we forget that opposites may not account for all the choices and insist that everything has got to be either this or that, we have fallen into the **either/or fallacy**. It is as though we put on a special pair of blinders that allowed us to look only straight right or straight left, not ahead, or up, or down, or part way in any direction.

The either/or fallacy assumes that if a thing is not perfectly right it is wrong. And there are no significant degrees of wrongness. Part wrong is all wrong. For some reason no one ever assumes that if a thing is not perfectly wrong, it must be all right. Human nature is given to pessimism as well as to dichotomizing.

As a specific example of two-valued thinking we can take reactions to the way the United States government treated citizens of Japanese descent during the Second World War. Their treatment has often been compared to that accorded the Jews in Nazi Germany at about the same time, but the comparison is a good example of the either/or fallacy. It is true that Japanese-Americans were treated shabbily since many were put in concentration camps and had their property confiscated. But to equate American confinement of the Japanese with Nazi extermination of the Jews at Belsen and Dachau is to overlook some significant differences. It is to fail to recognize that not all injustice is equally unjust.

In traditional logic there is a special kind of problem involving an either/or choice that is known as the **dilemma**. It presents two alternates as forced choices, both of which have highly undesirable consequences. Thus, the chooser is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, as an old dilemmatic cliché has it. The dilemma has traditionally been pictured as a wild bull-like creature whose two horns are the unwelcome choices. Anyone who is faced with a dilemma and fails to escape it is said to be impaled on the horns.

Unfortunately, real dilemmas exist in everyday life so that we often get stuck on one horn or the other. They are those awkward situations in which

there is no right course of action, just a choice of wrong ones. But sometimes the dilemma is false and then it is possible to evade the beast. Here is an example directed at a young man facing military service:

If you let yourself get drafted, they'll send you overseas and you'll get shot. But if you run away to Canada, you'll be a deserter and when they catch you they'll shoot you. However, you've got to do one of the two, so you are bound to be shot.

There are three methods of evading such a dilemma. The first is to take it by the horns, which means denying that the results will follow from the choices:

If I do get drafted, I may not be sent overseas but instead might spend my whole tour as a goldbrick at Camp Swampy; or if I go to Canada, I'll never be caught.

The second method is to escape through the horns, which means denying that the two alternatives represent the only possibilities and suggesting some other with less unpleasant consequences:

But perhaps I will never be drafted even if I stay home—after all, they can't take everybody; or maybe I'll enlist if they guarantee me a cushy job.

The third method is to rebut, which means to pose a counter dilemma. It is not a serious answer, but fancy juggling with words that serves to point up the fallacy of the original dilemma:

But if I let myself be drafted, I certainly won't be shot as a deserter, or if I run away to Canada, there will be no danger of being sent overseas and shot. So either way I'm quite safe.

The trick of rebutting is simple; it consists of negating the consequences and switching them, changing *If A then B, or if X then Y* into *If A then not Y, or if X then not B*. At this point logic has become pure sport, an intellectual game—in fact the very game Tweedledee was playing with Tweedledum in the quotation with which this chapter began.

**(18) The Golden Mean.** Too strong a reaction against the either/or fallacy can lead us to suppose that the truth is never to be found in direct contrast to falsity. We may get in the habit of always expecting that the best solution to a problem will be the middle one between two extremes, a golden mean. Some philosophers have encouraged this way of thinking. Plato said that the temple at Delphi, the holiest place in Greece, had inscribed on its walls the motto "Nothing in excess," and the Buddha's teaching is called "the Middle Way." But to be really golden, a mean has to be appropriate. If you

are driving a car on one of the freeways that lead to our large cities, it will be dangerous to drive either too fast or too slow. To be safe, you need to drive at the average speed, as it is set by the flow of traffic. If you pull onto the freeway with a fixed notion about what a safe, moderate speed is, you may find yourself in trouble.

Whether or not a mean is desirable depends on what the extremes are and on what kind of mean it is. When looting is going on during a riot, the police can react to the looters in either of two extreme ways, they might shoot them all on sight or they might help them cart the loot home. One possible mean between these extremes would be to shoot every second looter and help the others, but it would be a poor kind of mean. Furthermore, kindness and cruelty are extremes, with indifference as their mean, but moralists have generally assumed an extreme is better in this case.

In a choice along a scale, the best course is not always the middle one. It is good to be moderate, but only in moderation. For means, like other things that glitter, are not always gold.

## Exercise

15. The following arguments contain wrong inferences. Identify them.

1. All successful men get up early, so if you get up early you will be successful too.
2. Dudley is on an all-meat diet, and since fillet of rattlesnake, tiger chops, and roast dog are all meat, Dudley must be eating them.
3. A student's life is arduous. Drinking beer on Saturday night is part of a student's life, so it is arduous too.
4. College students should not be exempt from the draft. They are already too pampered and favored, with their sportscars and easy life. They have too much money and too little responsibility as it is.
5. ROTC should be required on all campuses. Who would object? Those who think patriotism is old-fashioned or who are afraid of having some order and discipline brought into their lives. But they are not the sort of persons we need listen to.
6. Mr. Twitmaze has decided that he did not become the success he had hoped to be. And since whatever does not succeed must fail, Twitmaze realizes he is a failure.
7. When a just man is faced with an unjust law, he has two alternatives: He can obey it, thus betraying his conscience and becoming unjust himself, or he can defy the law, thus betraying his obligations as a citizen. But anyone who does not fulfill his obligations as a citizen is not just. Thus in either case, a just man faced with an unjust law must act unjustly.

# 9

## THE LIGHT OF HISTORY

Historical linguistics is concerned mainly with the investigation of older forms of a language or a group of related languages. In a narrow sense, the word *historical* is somewhat inadequate, for the historical linguist can hardly stop with what has been written down. Written records, as we have seen, do not really go back very far; the earliest writing that we possess—and it is unlikely that there is much more left to be dug up that is appreciably earlier—show us language seemingly already in an advanced stage of development and certainly already grammatically complex. About the real beginnings of language we know nothing.

### RECONSTRUCTED FORMS

The earliest surviving records of English date from the seventh century of the Christian era—quite recent compared with the records of Sumerian, Hittite, Aramaic, Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. As a matter of fact, there is no writing of any substance in any language of the Germanic group, to which English belongs, earlier than the fourth-century Gothic translation of parts of the Bible, along with a brief commentary.

Consequently, the historical linguist often finds it necessary to reconstruct prehistoric forms. Such reconstructions, which are much like formulas, are always labeled by a preceding superior asterisk, thus *\*fōti*, the prehistoric English word that developed into Old English *fēt* and subsequently into



Modern English *feet*. It should go without saying that such a reconstruction is no guess, no mere shot in the dark. It is a well-established fact that the mid-front vowel of Old English *fēt* is a **mutation**, or **umlaut**, of the mid-back vowel occurring in *fōt* 'foot.' This particular mutation was due to the influence of the high-front vowel of the following syllable, which was lost after effecting this quite regular change; compare also *gōs* 'goose'/'*gēs* 'geese' and *tōð* 'tooth'/'*tēð* 'teeth.' The form *\*fōti* is not recorded only because in the period during which it was current no Englishman was in the least concerned with writing.

It is of course the same with other languages, even those whose records go back much farther than do those of English or Gothic. All forms from the common Germanic language (sometimes called Proto-Germanic or Primitive Germanic) of which both English and Gothic are developments must be entirely reconstructed; we can know Germanic only through those languages which are developments of it. The historical student of Latin is somewhat luckier than the Germanist in that his texts are not only much older but also much more voluminous than any texts in Germanic languages. But not even the student of Latin can stop with what has been written; he too must reconstruct earlier forms to explain historical ones, for Latin, like Germanic—indeed, like all languages which have been reduced to writing—had an immeasurably long prehistoric development, compared with which the entire historical period is but a moment or so.

## THE INDO-EUROPEAN "FAMILY"

English belongs to a huge complex of languages known as Indo-European, arbitrarily so named by scholars from what were in earlier times the easternmost and westernmost limits of the distribution of these languages. This distribution of a relatively uniform "parent" language, also called Indo-European, was accomplished in a series of migrations from an original homeland of whose precise location we cannot be sure, though it was almost certainly in Europe, probably in the northern or central part. The earliest migrations—those to India and Persia—would thus have been in a southeasterly direction. The migrations began in prehistoric times and extended over thousands of years.

In addition to Germanic, which is our principal concern, the Indo-European group includes Latin and its various developments in the so-called Romance languages (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Rumanian, and a few others of less importance), Greek, the Celtic languages (Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Breton, and others no longer spoken), the Slavic languages (Russian, Polish, Czecho-Slovak, Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, and Bulgarian), the Baltic languages (Lithuanian, Lettish, and the now extinct Old Prussian),

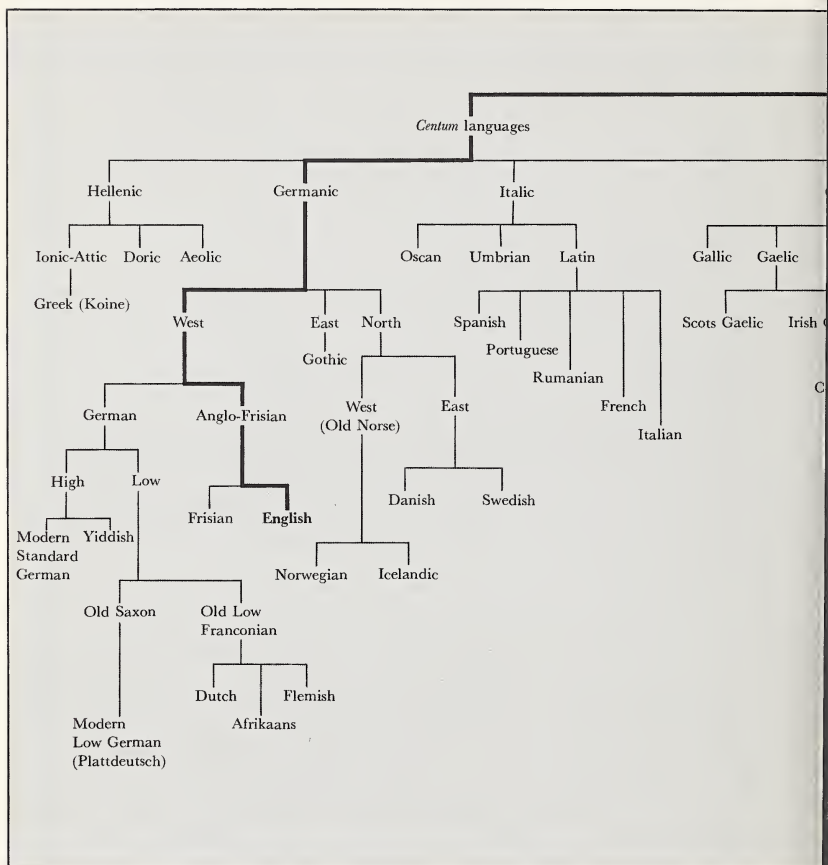
the Indic languages (Sanskrit and other non-Dravidian languages of India and the language of the Gypsies, who originally came from northwestern India), Iranian (or Persian), Armenian, Albanian, and the long extinct Hittite and Tocharian. Basque, spoken in the region of the Pyrenees by both French and Spanish nationals, is not Indo-European; it is seemingly totally unrelated to any living tongue. Other languages spoken in Europe but not of the Indo-European group are a number belonging to what is called the Finno-Ugric group, including Estonian, Finnish, Lappish, and Hungarian (or Magyar). The so-called Altaic group includes several varieties of Turkish, spoken over large areas of Europe as well as in Asia; Mongolian and Manchu, spoken only in Asia, are also classified as Altaic.

The relationship of the various Indo-European languages to one another is obvious in many respects, despite the manifold changes that have occurred in the various tongues in the course of many centuries. For one thing, all are **inflective**; that is, all are in some degree characterized by a system of modifications in the forms of words, principally by means of endings, to indicate grammatical relationships of one sort or another—endings like the plural suffix of *stones* and the past suffix of *loved*. Modern languages of Indo-European origin have lost much of the older inflective system, but all have retained traces of it. Relationships can be shown most strikingly, however, by a comparison of **cognates**—that is, related words—in various Indo-European languages.

We should expect such fundamental words as those for the lower numerals and those denoting close family relationships to be shared by various members of the group. Thus, to take a random shot, the Modern English numeral called *seven* so closely resembles Gothic *sibun*, High German *sieben*, Danish *sju*, Bulgarian *sedem*, Lithuanian *septyni*, Latin *septem*, and Sanskrit *sapta* that even the bleariest eye could detect their relationship. By examining such forms, always taking into consideration developments in the various languages, such as the change of Indo-European initial /s/ to /h/ in Greek (in which the word is *hepta*) and Iranian, linguists hypothesize an Indo-European original *\*septm̥*—no great feat in the light of all the evidence that we possess in the recorded forms. No such similarity exists between any of the forms cited and non-Indo-European words for the numeral—for instance, Mongolian *dologhan*, Korean *ilgop*, Turkish *yedi*, Vietnamese *bay*, Chinese *ch'i*.

## THE GERMANIC SUBGROUP

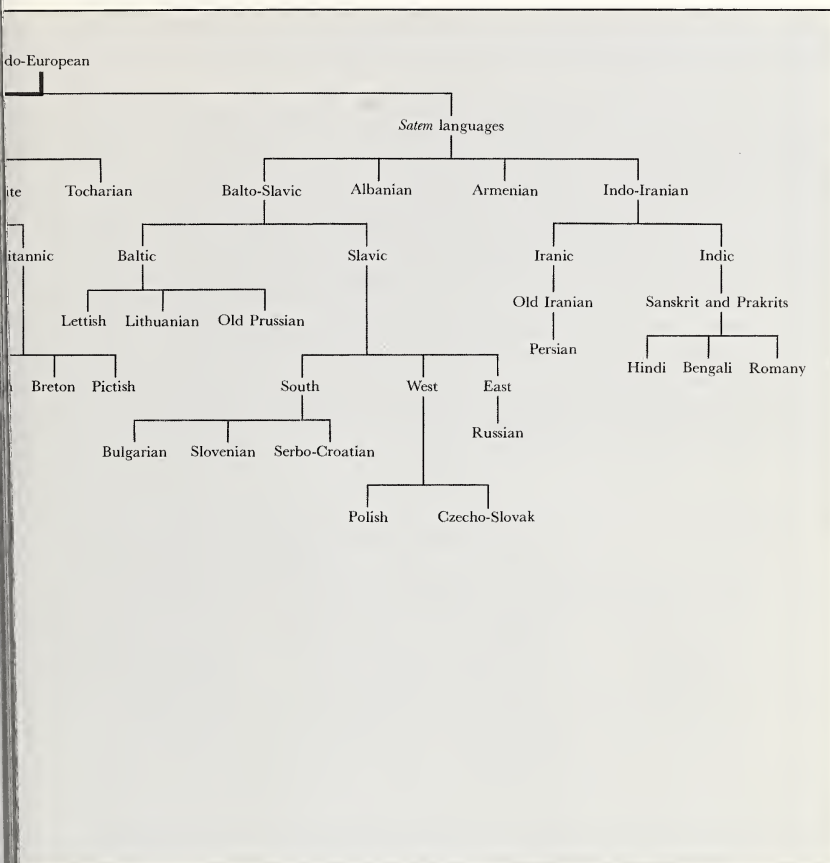
English, as we have seen in passing, belongs with the Germanic group of the Indo-European languages. More specifically, it is West Germanic, and even more specifically, it is usually regarded as a development of an older



common Anglo-Frisian language by virtue of certain features of English and Frisian not shared by the other Germanic languages.

In addition to English and Frisian, the West Germanic languages are High German, Dutch, Flemish (the language of northern Belgium, essentially the same language as Dutch), and the Low German patois spoken by humble people in the low-lying parts of northern Germany. Yiddish (Judeo-German) and Afrikaans (South African Dutch, spoken by persons of Dutch descent in South Africa) are also West Germanic in origin. The first is a development of a medieval High German dialect, with a good many elements from Hebrew

LANGUAGES DEVELOPED FROM IT



and Slavic. Other Germanic languages less closely related to English include the North Germanic (Scandinavian) group, comprising Norwegian, Icelandic, Swedish, and Danish, and, along with other East Germanic languages spoken in former times of which we possess no records, the East Germanic Gothic.

English shares with all the other Germanic languages the results of a prehistoric consonant shift, sometimes referred to as Grimm's Law, which accounts for the fact that English words containing the affected consonants do not resemble related words in non-Germanic languages as closely as, for instance, *meal* 'ground grain' resembles Latin *molere* 'to grind,' *same* resembles Sanskrit

*sama*, and *moon* resembles Greek *mēnē*. But the relationship of *father* to Latin *pater*, *eat* to Latin *edere*, *corn* to Latin *grānum*, *three* to Latin *trēs*, and *hund(red)* to Latin *cent-* is none the less real despite the different consonants of the English words.

Other Germanic characteristics retained in the English we speak are (1) a reduction of the numerous tense and aspect forms of Indo-European verbs (preserved and added to in Latin) to two tense forms, a present and a past, for example, *fall/fell*; (2) the formation of a new type of past by means of a dental suffix, as in *love/loved* and *step/stepped*; (3) a stress shift resulting in Germanic root stress—that is, initial stress except in verbs beginning with prefixes, like Modern English *withstand* and *unbind*—in contrast to the earlier Indo-European stress system, in which any syllable, even an inflectional ending, might be stressed.<sup>1</sup> There are a good many words common to the Germanic languages that have no known cognates in the other members of the Indo-European group and are not, as far as we know, loan-words from any non-Indo-European language. Examples include *sea*, *rain*, *drink*, and *broad* (to give only their English forms).

## Exercises

- Below are the names of some languages spoken in Europe, most of which are Indo-European. Which are not?

- |                  |            |                |              |
|------------------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. Albanian      | 6. Finnish | 11. Hungarian  | 16. Rumanian |
| 2. Basque        | 7. French  | 12. Italian    | 17. Russian  |
| 3. Bulgarian     | 8. Gaelic  | 13. Lithuanian | 18. Spanish  |
| 4. Czecho-Slovak | 9. Greek   | 14. Polish     | 19. Turkish  |
| 5. Estonian      | 10. Gypsy  | 15. Portuguese | 20. Welsh    |

- Below are the words for 'six' and 'nine' in several languages. By comparing the words, decide which languages are probably Indo-European and which not.

- |                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. English: six, nine  | 6. French: six, neuf     |
| 2. German: sechs, neun | 7. Spanish: seis, nueve  |
| 3. Dutch: zes, negen   | 8. Irish: se, naoi       |
| 4. Latin: sex, novem   | 9. Persian: shesh, noh   |
| 5. Italian: sei, nove  | 10. Turkish: altı, dokuz |

<sup>1</sup>Modern English of course has many loan-words that do not have initial stress, for instance, *idéa*, *unite*, *morále*, *gymnásium*, *telégraphy*. A few English proper names originally stressed in the traditional Germanic way have acquired un-Germanic stress, perhaps by analogy with supposed French accentuation or because of their spellings with doubled consonants, for instance *Littell* 'little' and *Barnett* 'burning.' As yet *Russell* and *Mitchell* have not been so distorted.

- |                                  |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 11. Hungarian: hat, kilencz      | 14. Korean: yŏsŏt, ahop           |
| 12. Mongolian: jirghoghan, yisun | 15. Japanese: roku, ku            |
| 13. Chinese: liu, chiu           | 16. Indonesian: enam,<br>sembilan |

3. Below are some pairs of related English and Latin words. In each case English has borrowed some form or derivative of the Latin word. For example, English *father* and Latin *pater* are related, and from the Latin word we get *paternal*, *paternity*, *patrimony*, and others. For each Latin word below, suggest at least one English word borrowed from it. If you have trouble thinking of one, look in an English dictionary under the beginning letters of the Latin word.

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. brother/frāter | 6. heart/cord-  |
| 2. garden/hortus  | 7. two/duo      |
| 3. foot/ped-      | 8. tooth/dentis |
| 4. few/paucus     | 9. knee/genu    |
| 5. thin/tenuis    | 10. acre/ager   |

## OLD ENGLISH: CHRONOLOGY AND DIALECTS

Old English, our tongue as it was spoken in England from approximately A.D. 449 to approximately 1100 and sometimes rather unhappily called Anglo-Saxon, was the speech of the earliest Germanic inhabitants of Britain. In the beginning it was somewhat more unified than the speech that was later to develop into the English dialects known as Kentish (spoken, as one would suspect, in Kent), West Saxon (spoken in Wessex, the southernmost part of the island), Mercian (spoken in the large region extending from the Thames to the Humber), and Northumbrian (spoken, as its name implies, north of the Humber, in Northumberland). These dialects were never very far apart even in the Old English period. Such differences as might impede communication did not exist in those days.

Old English was the speech of warrior-adventurers identified as Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (Iutae) by St. Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Church History of the English People*), completed around A.D. 730. It is Bede who supplies us with the date A.D. 449 for their first arrival. Regardless of their precise tribal affiliations on the Continent, we may be certain that they came from the great North German plain, which includes the southern part of the Jutland peninsula. By the time St. Augustine came in 597 to convert them to Christianity, they held, without much effective questioning of their right to do so, the greater part of what we now think of as England (*Engla-land* 'Angles' land').





Those who before the arrival of the Germanic tribesmen constituted the majority of the population of Britannia, as it was called by the Romans, were Celtic people who had for centuries been subjects of the Roman Empire. Rome had withdrawn its legions in 410, leaving these unbelligerent Britons pretty much to the mercy of whoever chose to pick on them. These turned out to be other Celts—Picts from the north and Scots (Irishmen) from the west, who had never known Roman subjugation. Around the middle of the fifth century (to fall back on Bede's chronology, which is probably accurate) at the ill-advised invitation of Vortigern, king of the Britons, a group of Germanic sea-raiders led by the synonymously named Hengest and Horsa (both appellations mean 'horse' and suggest bynames for big, bold, strong men) landed in Kent. They and their followers gave the Picts and Scots their

comeuppance in short order and then proceeded to harass those whom they had ostensibly come to protect. In the course of a century or so, many others arrived from the North German plain, encouraged by news of the fruitfulness of Britain and the spinelessness of the Britons.

Ultimately, these vigorous Germanic adventurers, who were to accept the name of a single tribe, *Engle* 'Angles,' as a national designation, completed the job of subjugating the Britons, many of whom crossed the Channel to the Gaulish peninsula then known as Armorica but subsequently, for self-evident reasons, as Brittany. Those who remained and were not either slain by the Germanic conquerors or assimilated to them by marriage or otherwise were largely congregated in the southwestern part of the island (modern Wales and Cornwall).

In a sense, then, we may think of England as beginning with the earliest settlements by Germanic peoples in Britain—a name that has become somewhat confusingly a synonym for England. As for the English language, we may be sure that the speech of the immigrants underwent no sea-change, and that their speech in their new home was in the beginning no different from what it had been before they left the Continent—just as American English was in its beginnings no different from the speech of the mother country in the seventeenth century.

## LOAN-WORDS IN OLD ENGLISH

In the course of the Old English period there occurred three events, each of which has had an important impact upon our language as far as its word stock is concerned. The first of these was the conversion to Christianity by St. Augustine in 597; the second, the Scandinavian invasions; and the third, the Norman Conquest.

Even before the English ever left the Continent of Europe, they had acquired, along with all the other Germanic peoples, a number of Latin words in the course of their contacts with the Romans. To cite their present English forms, these include *wine* (Latin *vīnum*), *street* (L. [*via*] *strāta*), *wall* (L. *vallum*), *dish* (L. *discus*), *mile* (L. *mīlia* [*pāssum*] 'thousand [paces]'), *cheese* (L. *cāseus*), and others—probably fewer than two hundred in all.

Between the time of their arrival in Britain and the coming of St. Augustine, the English had acquired a few Latin words from the British Celts. But the greatest impact of Latin upon the English word stock (as well as upon English culture) in those distant days came with the introduction of Latin Christianity among them. Mary S. Serjeantson in *A History of Foreign Words in English* (London, 1935) lists twelve words of Latin (and Greco-Latin) origin having to do with religion and learning as probably appearing in the lan-

guage before 650; these include (again to cite their current forms) *monk*, *nun*, and *minster* (L. *monastĕrium*). In the period after 650 extending to the Norman Conquest in 1066, words in the same areas are considerably more numerous and, since their transmission was usually by way of writing, they show fewer English phonological modifications. Serjeantson lists forty-five including (in Old English forms, some of which do not differ in the least from their present written forms) *abbod* 'abbot,' *altar*, (*a*)*postol* 'apostle,' *clĕric*, *crĕda* 'creed,' *discipul* 'disciple,' *letania* 'litany,' *martyr*, *mæsse* 'mass, that is, Holy Communion,' and *sanct*, which was later reborrowed from French in the form *saint*. Along with these are thirty-two others having to do with books and learning and five more having to do with the calendar and astronomy, including, among those that have survived, *accent*, *cānon*, *circul* 'circle,' (*e*)*pistol* 'epistle,' *grammatic* 'grammar,' *paper*, *scōl* 'school,' *tītōl* 'title,' *cālend* 'month,' and *comēla* 'comet.' A good many borrowings in this period have nothing to do with religion or learning, though among those listed in other categories by Serjeantson are *cilic* 'haircloth,' *dalmatice* 'dalmatic,' *stōl* 'scarf worn as vestment,' *cāp* 'cope,' and *tunece* 'tunic,' all of ecclesiastical significance, along with *antefn* 'anthem,' *cantic* 'hymn,' *ymen* 'hymn,' *psealm* 'psalm,' *clauſter* 'cloister,' and *tempel* 'temple.' In all, there were somewhat more than five hundred Latin loan-words in Old English, including those which the English brought with them from the Continent. This is, however, a rather insignificant number compared with the number of Latin borrowings in later periods.

The Celtic element in Old English is practically infinitesimal. The British Celts were a subjugated people, and it is really not surprising that the English, who were to a large extent responsible for their lowly status, should have adopted so few of their words. Of these few—leaving out of consideration doubtful cases—only *bin*, *tor* 'peak' and *coomb* (*combe*) 'valley' may be considered as still current. Another topographical term, *crag*, is of Celtic origin and presumably occurred in Old English, but it is not recorded until late in the Middle English period. There are, however, a good many English place names of Celtic origin, including *London* and *Avon*. A similar phenomenon is observable in America, where the English settlers took comparatively few words from the Indians—in fact only what they had to adopt for place names and for American flora, fauna, and topographical features for which there were no English names.

Disaster came to the English, who had themselves so overwhelmed the Celts, beginning late in the eighth century. Viking invaders, called *Dene* 'Danes' by the English (though some were from Norway and others later came from Sweden), began the sacking of churches and minsters in England. This was certainly bad enough, but it was nothing to compare with the large-scale trouble from the Scandinavians that began in 865, when they gained possession of almost the entire eastern part of England and, five years

later, proceeded to attack Wessex, in the southernmost part of the island. Wessex was at that time ruled by the brother of Alfred the Great.

It took a long eight years for Alfred, who succeeded his brother in 871, to win a victory over the Scandinavians that was, for the time being, decisive. But it was indeed only for the time being, even though in the subsequent reigns of Alfred, his son, and his three grandsons things went so well that England became a really unified nation. Alfred and his descendants had truly earned the title by which those descendants styled themselves—Kings of the English, not just Kings of Wessex.

But, late in the tenth century, trouble broke loose again from later generations of Scandinavians at a time when the only really weak king of Alfred's glorious line, the egregious Ethelred the Unready (that is, the ill-advised) was on the throne. As a result of Ethelred's foolishness, England suffered the indignity of being ruled by three Danish kings—Cnut, who married Ethelred's widow, his bastard son Harold I (Harold Harefoot), and his legitimate son Hardicanute. The noble English line of Alfred was restored with the accession of Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred.

Many of the Scandinavians had settled down peacefully in East Anglia and the shires to the north. They had apparently come to believe that it was a rather good thing to be Christian Englishmen, allied as they were by ties of racial and cultural kinship to Christian Englishmen who had themselves been heathen Germanic tribesmen in the beginning and who had never lost sight of their Continental origins. Ultimately, the Scandinavians were completely assimilated to their West Germanic kinsmen; they too had always been aware of the kinship.

What of the impact of this assimilation on the English language? It is difficult to assess, as the Danish Anglicist Otto Jespersen points out,<sup>2</sup> inasmuch as the Old English and Old Norse languages were very similar. Jespersen cites, among others, as words in common to both languages *man, wife, thing, winter, summer, will, meet, come, bring, ride, stand, full, and well*. Occasionally, a slightly dissimilar Scandinavian word has displaced an English one, which is why we say *sister* (Scand. *systir*) instead of \**swester* (OE *sweostor*), *give* and *gift* instead of OE *gife* and *gift*, and *egg* instead of OE *ey*. Except for *sister*, the native forms cited above were used by Chaucer and a good many others who came later than he, until the Scandinavian forms from the North, where the heaviest Scandinavian settlements were, took over completely in the English of London, and hence in Standard English.

Many Modern English words with /k/ or /g/ before or after *e* and *i*—for example, *kid, keel, kill, gear, get, leg*, and the previously cited *give, gift, and egg*—are of Scandinavian origin. The consonant sounds in question occurred

<sup>2</sup>*Growth and Structure of the English Language*, 9th ed. (New York, 1956), pp. 66–67. First published in 1905.

in the immediate vicinity of front vowels in only a few words in late Old English. The sequence /sk/ in Modern English may also indicate Scandinavian origin, as in *scarf*, *scold*, *skill*, and *sky*, for long before the time when these words entered our language, early Old English /sk/ had become /š/. *Shirt* and *skirt*, despite the Modern English difference in meaning, represent respectively English and Scandinavian forms developing from a single common Germanic form.

Perhaps the most important change due to Scandinavian influence affected the third person plural forms of the personal pronouns, which will be discussed later in this chapter. It is enough to say here that the *th-* forms (*they*, *their*, *them*) that we use today are all of Scandinavian origin.

There was also an interesting semantic influence from Scandinavian; that is to say, certain English words acquired the different, though related, meanings of their Scandinavian cognates. Jespersen points out that in Modern English *gift* both the initial consonant and the modern meaning are due to Scandinavian. Old English *gift*, pronounced /jift/, meant 'portion paid by a man for his bride,' but the related Scandinavian word, pronounced /gift/, had the same meaning as our Modern English word. The more specialized meaning seems not to have survived the Old English period. Jespersen says, "No subtler linguistic influence can be imagined than this, where a word has been modified both with regard to pronunciation and meaning, and curiously enough has by that process been brought nearer to the verb from which it was originally derived (*give*)" (p. 71). There have been similar semantic shifts in *bread*, *bloom*, *dream*, *dwell*, *earl*, and *plow*.

Most of the Scandinavian influences cited are not evident in writing that has come down to us from the Old English period. We may be sure, however, that these influences were strong in the spoken language in the areas of Scandinavian settlement, slow though some of them may have been in reaching the speech of London.

Among the earliest Scandinavian loan-words to occur in writing—and they occur very late indeed in the Old English period—are *law* (OE *lagu*, Scand. *lag*) and *take* (OE *tacan*, Scand. *taka*). The latter has completely displaced its Old English equivalent *niman* (cognate with High German *nehmen*), although it occurs in Modern English as *nim* in the sense 'steal'; Shakespeare knew the word and named his thieving Corporal Nym in *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* appropriately enough.

Having civilized the heathen Scandinavians and made thoroughly nice people of them, the English were shortly beset by the greatest disaster that had befallen them thus far—in fact, a greater disaster than has ever since befallen them, not even excepting the Blitzkrieg waged against them in 1940. This time also, as was the case with the Scandinavian invasions, they had to contend with their own remote kinsmen—namely, the Normans,



whose name means Norsemen, descendants of Vikings who had forcibly settled themselves in France in the ninth and tenth centuries. England at the time of the Norman Conquest was, and had been for a long time, a center of Western European culture and a citadel of Christianity. We need be under no outdated illusions about the Norman Conquest; it amounted to the ignominious defeat of a superior culture by a considerably inferior one. The fact that the Normans had been Frenchmen, in a very loose sense, for a few generations need not delude us into supposing that they in any particular resembled the Chevalier Bayard. They were in fact ruffians, though not heathens.

Every schoolboy knows of the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and in any event this is not the place to discuss it. The victory of the Norman duke, William the Bastard—thereafter known in more seemly fashion as William the Conqueror—amounted to the destruction in large part of English culture. In those days France had no literature comparable to that of England, nor any comparable art or learning—not even a literary language that could match the West Saxon dialect of English, which had long before become the medium of literature and learning all over England. The linguistic impact of the Conquest, however, is not a phenomenon of Old English times, for by about 1100 English had already undergone such changes—changes with which the Conquest of course had nothing to do—that from that time on to about 1500 we refer to it as Middle English. The French linguistic influence will therefore be treated in a more appropriate place; it must suffice here to say that it was almost entirely confined to the word stock. English acquired thousands of French words, most of them still a part of our vocabulary.

## Exercises

4. Match the dates on the left with the events on the right.

- |         |                                                 |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1. 410  | (a) Alfred the Great becomes King of England    |
| 2. 449  | (b) Angles and Saxons arrive in Britain         |
| 3. 597  | (c) Scandinavians first invade England          |
| 4. 865  | (d) Normans conquer England                     |
| 5. 871  | (e) Roman legions leave Britain                 |
| 6. 1066 | (f) St. Augustine begins to convert the English |

5. The following words were all borrowed from foreign languages during the Old English period. From what language was each taken? Use a dictionary.

- |           |          |          |         |            |
|-----------|----------|----------|---------|------------|
| 1. anchor | 3. brock | 5. fever | 7. root | 9. trout   |
| 2. bin    | 4. crisp | 6. rag   | 8. sale | 10. window |



6. On p. 314, *bloom*, *bread*, *dream*, *dwelt*, *earl*, and *plow* were mentioned as English words whose meaning was influenced by similar Scandinavian words. Find the original Old English meaning of at least one of them by looking at their etymologies in a dictionary.

## THE SOUNDS AND SPELLING OF OLD ENGLISH

The following description of Old English will concern itself mainly with the West Saxon dialect of about the year 1000—the form of English that had become the standard for all England largely because of the impetus given to literature and learning by Alfred the Great in the latter years of the ninth century, resulting in the prestige enjoyed by this dialect of the extreme south. It is the speech of most of the literary texts that have come down to us. Considerably later it was supplanted as a standard by the speech of London—the East Midland of Middle English, a development of the Old English Mercian dialect. But during the greater part of the Middle English period there was no literary dialect comparable to the West Saxon dialect of Old English: a writer wrote in the dialect of his native region. As a matter of fact, it really makes little difference in our understanding of historical developments that we study West Saxon, about which we know most, rather than the Mercian from which our own speech has developed, for, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the various dialects of Old English were not greatly differentiated.

In Old English writing, the letters of the Roman alphabet were used, in their somewhat modified Irish shapes (see Chapter 3, pp. 70–71), at first with approximately the same values that they had in the school Latin of the period, though *h* had its Latin value only when it headed a syllable. In late Old English, with which we are here concerned, *c* and *g* developed additional values, to be described later. As we have seen, the English added *þ*, *ð*, and *ƿ*.

The vowel symbols may for all practical purposes be equated with *a*, *æ*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u* when we write these letters as phonetic symbols. To these must be added *y*, which in Old English always represented a high-front rounded vowel (like German *ü* or French *u*); this vowel later lost its lip-rounding and thus fell together with *i*. There were two vowel sequences, or diphthongs, written *ea* and *eo*.

Vowel quantity was phonemic in Old English; it distinguished, for instance, *hōf* ‘hoof’ from *hof* ‘enclosure’ and *swīcan* ‘to deceive’ from *swican* ‘deceivers.’ The macrons that we encounter in school texts and in citations of words

(as in the just cited *hōf* and *swīcan*) have been put there by modern scholars; length was ordinarily not marked in any way in Old English writing.

Among the consonants, Old English had the same stops as Modern English. These may be illustrated in initial position by the following words: *pīl* 'stake,' *tīma* 'time,' *cōl* 'cool,' *bēn* 'prayer,' *dōm* 'doom,' *gold* 'gold.' The voiceless velar stop was usually written *c* rather than *k*. As we have seen above in our discussion of Scandinavian loan-words (pp. 313-14), /g/ and /k/ did not normally occur in late Old English in the immediate vicinity of front vowels; in such a phonetic environment older /g/ and /k/ were pronounced respectively /j/ and /č/, as in *gēar* 'year' and *cild* 'child.' The writing with *y* and *ch* did not come until long after the sound change.

In addition to /č/, Old English had the affricate /j/, written *cg*, as in *ecg* 'edge.' This phoneme never occurred initially. All Modern English words beginning with it, such as *gem*, *gin*, and *jet*, are loan-words, mostly from Old French or Latin.

At the beginning of a syllable *h* represented the aspirate, as in *hām* 'home,' *hōd* 'hood,' and *behealdan* 'to hold.' Elsewhere, however, the symbol stood for the voiceless velar fricative sound written *ch* in German *ach* (with a more forward variety in *ich*), as in *purh* 'through,' and *niht* 'night.' The later spelling for this sound was *gh*. It is articulated in the same manner as the voiceless velar stop /k/, but with incomplete closure; through the partial opening, breath is forced. By far the best way of learning how to pronounce it, however, is to acquire a German, listen to his *ch*- words carefully, and imitate him as closely as possible, though an elderly rural Scot would suffice if one could cajole him into repeating *loch* 'lake' and *bricht moonlicht nicht* 'bright moonlight night' over and over again. We go on writing this *gh*, as in *through*, *thought*, and *plight*, but the sound that it symbolized has either disappeared, as in the words cited, or become the labiodental fricative /f/, as in *laugh*, *cough*, and *rough*.

Old English had also a voiced-velar fricative, written *g*. If one has mastered the articulation of the voiceless velar fricative described in the preceding paragraph, adding voice ought to be mere child's play. As far as our purposes are concerned, the game is hardly worth the candle. The sound in question occurred medially after back vowels, as in *boga* 'bow (weapon)' and *āgan* 'to own'; the modern forms given in the definitions indicate subsequent developments.

The other fricatives in Old English were /f/, /θ/, /s/, and /š/, written respectively *f*, *þ* (or *ð*), *s*, and *sc*, as in *ful* 'full,' *þæt* 'that,' *sār* 'sore,' and *scort* 'short.' Between vowels or between a vowel and a voiced consonant, /f/, /θ/, and /s/ had voiced allophones, respectively [v], [ð], and [z]. Since these could occur only medially, Old English had no such contrastive pairs as *fast*/*vast*, *thigh*/*thy*, *mouth* (n.)/*mouth* (v.), *seal*/*zeal*, and *mace*/*maze*; it

was not until later that the voiced fricatives in question became phonemes. The Old English medial allophones are reflected in *staff/staves* (OE *stæf/stafas*), *bath/bathe* (OE *bæð*<sup>3</sup>/*baðian*) and *house/houses* (OE *hūs/hūsas*).

The remaining Old English consonantal phonemes are /l/, /r/, /m/, /n/, and /w/. Concerning these it is necessary to comment only that /r/ was probably trilled wherever it occurred, and certainly so in initial position and after other consonants (as in the sequences written *br*, *cr*, and *dr*), and that /n/ was pronounced [ŋ] before the velar stops /g/ and /k/. The Modern English loss of the voiced velar stop in the sequence written *ng* has made the allophonic [ŋ] into a phoneme differentiating such Modern English pairs as *sin* and *sing*.

The consonant sequences written *hl* (*hlēapan* 'to leap'), *hn* (*hnappian* 'to nap'), *hr* (*hrēaw* 'raw'), and *hw* (*hwēol* 'wheel') were pronounced as their spelling suggests. Only the last survives, mainly in the speech of Americans; in Standard British English *wheel* and *weal* are homophones. In all the others the first element of the sequence has been lost. Middle English scribes chose to write *hw* less accurately as *wh*.

Similarly, the *cn* and *gn* of *cnēow* 'knee' and *gnagan* 'to gnaw' indicate actual pronunciations; the *k* (replacing older *c*) and the *g* of the modern forms in the definitions have no more than a historical significance today, but tradition requires that they still be written. The *wr* of *wrāð* 'wroth' and *writan* 'to write' indicates yet another sound sequence that has been simplified but is still written just as if it had not been. A sound sequence was also indicated by *wl*, as in *wlanc* 'splendid,' *wlite* 'brightness,' and (*ā*)*wlyspian* 'to lisp.' Old English had a fairish number of *wl* words, some of which retained the *w* until the end of the Middle English period, but only *lisp* seems to have survived in Modern English, simplified in both spelling and pronunciation.

The writing *mb* always indicated a consonant sequence, finally as in *camb* 'comb' as well as medially. In final position the second member of this sequence was long ago lost, but we go on writing it in words that had it in Old English as well as in a number of words that did not have it, for instance, *limb* (OE *lim*), in which the *b* could have been added only after the loss of the voiced labial stop in pronunciation.

The stress system of Old English was that of Germanic, as already described (p. 308). To what has been said, it is important to add only that compounds (of which there were many) consisting of two nouns or adjective plus noun had secondary stress on their second element, for instance, *læcehūs* 'leech-house, that is, hospital' and *swōtmēte* 'sweetmeat.'

<sup>3</sup>To write *ð* here is to follow the preferred practice of many of the scribes in late Old English times, who used *þ* only in initial position—also the practice of Icelandic, which alone uses these symbols today.

## HOW OLD ENGLISH THROWS LIGHT ON MODERN ENGLISH

Our more or less cursory examination of the Old English sound system has thus far provided answers to certain questions about Modern English, for instance, the /f/-/v/ alternation in *staff/staves*, the /s/-/z/ alternation in *house/houses*, and the /θ/-/ð/ alternation in *bath/bathes*. By means of such an examination, we shall learn, for instance, why the overwhelming majority of Modern English plurals have sibilant suffixes (*seats, seeds, and sieges*, for example), and also why these same suffixes occur in the third person singular present indicative of verbs (*eats, aids, cases*), and, disregarding the fairly recent apostrophe, in genitive forms (*cat's, cad's, Madge's*). We shall return to these specific matters later.

## Exercise

7. Below are some words in their Old English spelling. They are generally, although not exactly, similar to the modern words that have developed from them. Try to guess the modern words. (You can check yourself by looking at the dictionary etymology of the modern word you have guessed, to see whether it has the Old English form as its origin.)

- |           |         |           |           |                  |
|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| 1. æppel  | 4. nosu | 7. hring  | 10. brycg | 13. sunnan-dæg   |
| 2. sweord | 5. hors | 8. mearc  | 11. ofer  | 14. giestran-dæg |
| 3. wīf    | 6. fisc | 9. cyrtel | 12. sunne | 15. geong        |

## THE OLD ENGLISH INFLECTIONAL SYSTEM

In its inflectional system Old English was in approximately the same stage of development as Modern German. This is to say that it was somewhat less elaborate than Latin in the number of different forms that a word might have, but much more elaborate than Modern English. For one thing, there was the matter of grammatical gender, which the speaker of Modern English need never give a thought to except insofar as the third person singular pronouns are concerned. To cite a single instance, we now have a single form of the definite article, so that we say "*the* man, *the* lady, and *the* girl"; but a speaker in Old English times had to say "*se* mann, *sēo* hlāfdige, and *þæt* mægden," just as a present-day German must say "*der* Mann, *die* Frau, und *das* Mädchen." The form of the article changes according to the grammatical gender of the nouns; the first is masculine, the second feminine, and the third

neuter. The fact that the Old English and German words for 'girl' are neuter indicates that grammatical gender need not accord with sex. Under such a system many inanimate objects are masculine or feminine rather than neuter; indeed, in the Latin-derived languages, where the neuter of the parent Latin has been lost, all nouns designating inanimate objects must be classified as either masculine or feminine, as indeed some such words were in Latin itself.

Grammatical gender broke down when practically all nouns, regardless of their earlier genders, had come to form their plurals in *-es* and an indeclinable article *the* was made to do for the many forms of the demonstrative pronoun that in Old English did service as articles (p. 324). These changes began to manifest themselves as tendencies in late Old English times. The consequent loss of grammatical gender must be adjudged one of the most important developments in the history of English. Once an important feature of our grammatical system, it has disappeared without leaving a trace. It is important to know of its former existence only because Old English nouns were declined according to their gender.

## A WORD ABOUT CASES

The Old English noun declension of greatest relevance to Modern English had three different forms in the singular and three different forms in the plural, though, as we shall see, the neuter nominative-accusative plural form might be identical with the nominative-accusative singular form. We speak of a **nominative-accusative form** because in this declension originally distinct **nominative** (subject) and **accusative** (usually direct object, but also used with certain prepositions) forms had fallen together in a single form in both singular and plural. The other relevant form is that for the **genitive**—perhaps a better term in reference to nouns than **possessive**, since even in Modern English possession is not necessarily indicated by the form in *'s*, as in "a minute's delay," "a stone's throw," and "a teachers' college"; the *nights* of "he works nights" is historically a genitive singular, though usually regarded as a plural form nowadays. Old English had a number of nonpossessive genitive functions that have not survived.

The Old English noun also had a **dative-instrumental form**, which was used for the indirect object, for the direct object of a number of verbs, and for the object of most prepositions. It was also used adverbially, as in *hwīlum* 'at times' as well as in a variety of functions now requiring the use of *to*, *by*, *with*, or *for*. This form, representing a merging of two earlier distinct forms, survives in Modern English *alive* (OE *on līfe* 'in life'). *Why* (OE *hwȳ*), it should be mentioned in passing, is from the distinctive instrumental form of the



interrogative pronoun *hwæt* 'what'; and adverbial *the*, as in "the sooner, the better" and similar expressions in which it precedes an adjective or adverb in the comparative degree, is from an instrumental form of the demonstrative pronoun *se*, which also functioned as a definite article. Dictionaries enter the adverb form separately from the Modern English definite article *the* of identical form, which precedes nouns. The original meaning of adverbial (instrumental) *the* (OE *þē*) was something like 'by that much' or 'by so much.'

## THE SOURCE OF THE MODERN ENGLISH GENITIVE

Only one of the three main Old English singular declensions of the noun is of significance as far as the language we speak is concerned. It consisted of masculines and neuters that were identical in their singular endings, thus:

|                        |                             |                              |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE: | <i>stān</i> (masc.) 'stone' | <i>dēor</i> (neut.) 'animal' |
| GENITIVE:              | <i>stānes</i>               | <i>dēores</i>                |
| DATIVE-INSTRUMENTAL:   | <i>stāne</i>                | <i>dēore</i>                 |

A small number of very frequently used masculines from minor declensions also had genitive singulars in *-es*. These include *mann* 'man,' *wifmann* 'woman' (a compound, masculine because of its second element), *fōt* 'foot,' and *tōð* 'tooth.'

The genitive singular in *-es* was thus of such frequent occurrence in Old English—about sixty percent of all nouns one encounters in one's reading form their genitives so—that it is not surprising that it should have survived in our genitive ending written *-s*, the apostrophe being a mere printer's gimmick, doubtless born of the mistaken notion that the genitive ending was a contraction of *his*. Before the end of the twelfth century, feminine nouns, most of which had in Old English genitive singulars in *-e*, came to acquire new analogical forms in *-es*; so in time did masculines, feminines, and neuters belonging to a declension that in Old English had *-an* in the genitive singular. A few fossilized "*s*-less" genitives survive from the Old English feminines with a subsequently lost *-e*, for instance *Lady Day* 'Feast of the Annunciation,' *ladybird*, *ladyfinger*, and *marigold* (that is, 'Mary's gold').

When in the course of the Middle English period (from about 1100 to about 1500) the dative-instrumental case was lost, the noun arrived at its present two-form system in the singular: one form without ending, one with *-s*, as in *stone*, *stone's* (*throw*); *foot*, *foot's* (*length*). The reduction of the Old English plural forms was even more drastic.



## THE SOURCE OF MODERN ENGLISH PLURAL FORMS

Every noun, regardless of gender, had a genitive plural in *-a* and a dative-instrumental plural in *-(u)m*. These forms were just as “plural” as the nominative-accusative forms. Unlike Modern English, then, Old English had no way of indicating plurality as such. In other words, there was no *single* plural form of *stān* corresponding to Modern English *stones* or of *tōð* corresponding to *teeth*. Plurality could not be expressed by itself, independently of case.

In those declensions that alone concern us—and to the ones already treated must be added two more, exemplified by *oxa* ‘ox’ and *fōt* ‘foot’—the plural forms were as follows:

|                        |        |        |       |       |
|------------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE: | stānas | dēor   | fēt   | oxan  |
| GENITIVE:              | stāna  | dēora  | fōta  | oxena |
| DATIVE-INSTRUMENTAL:   | stānum | dēorum | fōtum | oxum  |

All the nominative-accusative forms have survived in *stones*, *deer*, *feet*, and *oxen*. In the course of the Middle English period they became *general* plural forms, not just *case* forms as they had been in Old English.

Even in Old English times somewhat more than a third of all commonly used nouns formed their nominative-accusative plurals in *-as*, like *stānas*. As time went on, more and more were to inflect by analogy with this system, so that by the latter part of the Middle English period all but a handful formed their general plurals with the ending *-es*, the *e* standing for the reduced vowel /ə/, which developed from Old English unstressed *a*. The handful of exceptional words acquired general plural forms by an identical extension of the nominative-accusative plural form. The situation at the end of the Middle English period may be shown paradigmatically as follows:

|                    |                    |        |        |                   |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------|--------|-------------------|
| GENERAL SINGULAR:  | stoon <sup>4</sup> | deer   | foot   | oxe               |
| GENITIVE SINGULAR: | stoones            | deeres | footes | oxes <sup>5</sup> |
| GENERAL PLURAL:    | stoones            | deer   | feet   | oxen              |

This is essentially the situation that prevails today, when the genitive plurals of all nouns except the very few that do not conform to *stone* (ME *stoon*) remain identical in pronunciation with what we have called their general plural forms: thus, *students’ caps* and *students cheered*. The exceptions add *s* by analogy: thus, *oxen’s*, *men’s*, and the like.

With unchanged plurals like *deer* are *sheep* (*scēap*), *kind* (*cynd*), *horse* (now

<sup>4</sup>Old-English *ā* became long /ɔ/ in Middle English and was spelled *o* or *oo*. The sound of Old English *ō* remained unchanged and, to the confusion of beginning students of Middle English, was also spelled *o* or *oo*. When vowel symbols are doubled, as they came increasingly to be in Middle English, the editorial macron is unnecessary, since the doubling itself indicates length.

<sup>5</sup>The *-s* genitive here is analogical (see p. 321). The Old English form had *-an*.

plural in military use only, as in *a troop of horse*, but in general use as a plural form down to the seventeenth century, according to the *OED*), *swine* (*swīn*), *neat* 'cattle,' and *folk* (*folc*), which has in "folksy" circles an analogical plural in *-s*. All these were neuters in Old English. Plural *kind*, as in "these kind" and "those kind" is thoroughly detested by most teachers and by many literary people nowadays but has occurred in the writings of a good many distinguished authors. Perversely enough, in the light of the overwhelming majority of *s*-plurals, *fish* and *fowl*, both masculine in Old English and having nominative-accusative plural forms in *-as* (*fiscas*, *fuglas*), have acquired unchanged plurals—perhaps by analogy with *deer*, *sheep*, and the like—though both may also have *s*-plurals.

Modern English retains, more or less as fossils, only seven plurals in common usage with mutated vowel: *feet*, *geese*, *teeth*, *mice*, *lice*, *men*, and *women*, and there were not many others in Old English. In *women* the mutation now is apparent only in the spelling, for the real mutation in the final syllable has been obscured by weakened stress. Mutation has nothing to do with the high front vowel in the first syllable of the word as it is pronounced in Modern English. *Kine* 'cows,' archaic in Standard English, but still alive in British English dialectal usage, is yet another example of mutation, but a badly mixed-up one. The Old English nominative-accusative plural of *cū* 'cow' was *cȳ*, the regular development of which is *kīe* (or *kȳe*), now a northern English dialect word; it occurs, among other places, in Robert Burns's *Twa Dogs*: "The kye stood rowtin' i' the loan," that is, 'The cows stood bellowing in the lane.' Around the latter part of the thirteenth century, however, while *-en* (OE *-an*) was still a living plural suffix, it was added to the already plural *kīe*, resulting in a double plural form *kine*. As is frequently the case, an erroneous form became in time the usual one in standard use, the present plural *cows* not occurring much before the seventeenth century. Other double plurals are *children* and *brethren*. The expected development of Old English *cildru*, the nominative-accusative plural of *cild* 'child,' which belonged to a minor declension not alluded to heretofore, is today current only as a dialect form, *childer*. To this historically correct but currently unfashionable form the *-en* plural ending was blunderingly added; the result of the blunder is *child(e)ren*. The development of the double plural *brethren* is too complicated for discussion here; it must suffice to say simply that the *-en* ending did not originally belong to it. The only uncontaminated survival of the Old English declension that was exemplified above by *oxa*, with its nominative-accusative plural *oxan*, is the word *oxen* itself.

Plural forms other than the nominative-accusative survive after a fashion. The genitive plural in *-a*, which like other Old English vowels in inflectional syllables was ultimately lost, frequently occurs after numerals, as in "six foot (Old English *fōta*) tall and weighing thirteen stone (*stāna*)."<sup>1</sup> (A stone as a measure of weight for human beings and large animals is in British English

the equivalent of fourteen pounds.) Formerly *pound* (Old English genitive plural *punda*) was used in the same way: the *OED* cites from around 1704 “an hundred Pound of Sorrow.” The dative plural in *-um* survives in *seldom* and *whilom* (OE *hwīlum*).

### Exercise

8. Some facts about Modern English can be explained by the inflectional system of Old English. Answer these questions:
  1. What is the origin of the genitive ending, as in *stone's* or *man's*?
  2. Why do we say *ladyfinger* instead of *lady's finger*?
  3. What irregular plural forms in Modern English come to us from Old English?
  4. Why do we often say “six foot tall” rather than “six feet tall”?
  5. In what two Modern English words is the Old English ending *-um* still pronounced?

## THE DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS AND ARTICLES

Old English had two sets of demonstrative pronouns: *se* (masc.), *þæt* (neut.), *sēo* (fem.), which functioned as definite articles, and the less-used *þes* (masc.), *þis* (neut.), *þeos* (fem.). These had elaborate declensional systems, each with nine different forms in the singular alone.

There is of course no reason to suppose that this elaborate system gave speakers of English in those days any more trouble than an equally elaborate system gives Germans today. When the multiplicity of forms functioning as definite article in English was reduced to a single form, *the*, a desire for simplification had nothing to do with the reduction. One form was all that was needed when, in Middle English times, grammatical gender gave way to our present system of natural gender. Our *the* shows the extension of the *þ*-of the nonnominative forms into the old masculine nominative *se*.

Our demonstrative *that* is obviously the same as the Old English *þæt*, which was the nominative-accusative neuter demonstrative and which also functioned as definite article. *This* is just as obviously Old English *þis*, the nominative-accusative neuter of the second, less-used demonstrative, whose common-gender nominative-accusative plural, *þās*, is the prototype of *those*. The common-gender nominative-accusative plural of the *se*, *þæt*, *sēo* demonstrative was *þā*. This is the source of the Middle English form used by Chaucer, *thō*, which was ultimately to give way to *those*. A new plural demonstrative, *these*, appeared first in Middle English; it could be from Old English *þes* or *þeos*.

## ADJECTIVE AND ADVERB FORMS

Adjectives in Old English were even more complicated in their multiplicity of forms than demonstratives. For practically all, there was a so-called strong declension, usually with ten different forms in a distribution that makes no sense except for the historical linguist. This declension, like its counterpart in German, was regularly used when the adjective was not preceded by a demonstrative (including its use in the predicate). Under other circumstances a quite different "weak" declension with considerably fewer different forms was used. The two adjective systems, which have no relevance whatsoever to Modern English, survived, though in greatly simplified form, almost to the end of the Middle English period.

Adjectives were regularly compared in Old English by adding the suffixes *-ra* and *-ost*, which have come down to us as *-er* and *-est*. A few had mutated vowels in the comparative and superlative; the sole survivors of this group are *elder* and *eldest*, which are much less frequently used than the analogical *older* and *oldest*. A very few others had comparative and superlative forms whose roots were different from those of the positive forms; these survive in *good/better/best*, *little/less/least*, *much/more/most*, and *evil/worse/worst*.

One more notation about adjectives, and we will be done with them. Old English *lic*, a word meaning 'body, form,' was frequently suffixed to nouns, to make adjectives out of them. As an unstressed suffix its vowel was shortened—thus, *mædenlic* 'maidenly,' *prēostlic* 'priestly,' and *wīflīc* 'womanly.' The same suffix was added to adjectives to make alternative adjective forms out of them, thus *scearplic* 'sharp,' *sleaclic* 'slack,' and *hefiglic* 'heavy.' This ending, written *lich* in Middle English times, is of course our *-ly*. The loss of *-ch* in unstressed syllables was a phenomenon of late Middle English times. The ending, nowadays regarded as primarily adverbial, occurs in a great many Modern English adjectives: in addition to those cited above, in *manly*, *homely*, *lovely*, *friendly*, *godly*, and a number of others.

Most Old English adverbs were formed from adjectives by adding the suffix *-e*. When this vowel in final position was lost late in the Middle English period, there was no longer any formal distinction between many adjectives and adverbs; both the adjective *dēop* and the adverb *dēope* end up as Modern English *deep*, as in, respectively, *He dug a deep hole* and *He dug deep*. The often-criticized injunction *Drive Slow* is thus historically impeccable, *slow* being the direct development of Old English *slāwe* as well as of *slāw* 'slow.' Adjectives in *-lic* likewise added the *e* to form adverbs, and in some instances *-lice* must have been added to adjectives which had no form in *-lic*. In any event, with Middle English loss of both *-e* and unstressed *-ch*, *-liche* and *-lich* fell together as *-ly*, which has long functioned as our regular adverb-forming suffix. Adverbs were compared in Old English by suffixing *-or* and *-ost* or *-est*, which end up in Modern English in the same forms as the adjectival endings.

## THE PERSONAL AND RELATIVE PRONOUNS

The system of personal pronouns has simplified itself less in the course of the development of our language than any other group of words. The only simplification, in fact—aside from the loss of the dual number and the second person singular forms beginning with *th*, to be discussed below—has been the reduction of the number of forms of the masculine third person singular pronoun from four to three. Old English had distinctive forms *hine* (accusative) and *him* (dative-instrumental). These merged in a single objective form *him*, and the concept of a dative-instrumental case was lost for the pronouns as it had already been for the nouns. Unlike the nouns, however, the singular pronouns have retained separate subjective and objective forms to such an extent that we must, for example, differentiate *I* and *me*, depending upon their grammatical function.

By and large the system became somewhat more complex than it had been in Old English. In the first and second person singular Middle English acquired some additional forms when the *n* of *mīn* and *thīn* was lost before consonants, *mīn*/*mȳ* and *thīn*/*thȳ* being used, and continuing to be used for a long time thereafter, precisely as we use *an*<sup>6</sup> and *a*; thus, Hamlet admonishes his mother to “go not to mine Vnkles bed” (III.iv.159). (Note that the Fool’s *nuncle* in King Lear resulted from his misunderstanding of *mine uncle* as *my nuncle*.) The present English use of *mine* and its derivative *my* represents a structural change, with *my* occurring as the modifier of a noun and *mine* standing alone (*It was my fault, The fault was mine*); in other words, the older modifying function formerly shared by both *mine* and *my* is now the exclusive function of *my*. *Thine* and *thy* had precisely the same development, though these forms are now archaic. Other forms originating in Middle English, by analogy with other genitives in *-s*, are *hers*, *ours*, *yours*, and *theirs*.

The /h/ of the unstressed pronouns written with *h* is generally lost when these pronouns occur in natural running speech, as in “I told *her* so,” “I thought *he* would never finish,” “What’s *his* name?” “She lost *her* gloves,” and so on. The nominative form of the neuter pronoun likewise used to begin with /h/ and was written *hit*. *Hit* is still the stressed form in certain types of folk speech. In early Middle English times, however, a form without /h/, written *it*, began to occur in unstressed positions. Ultimately this form was restressed and used, as it is today, in all positions.

Long after *hit* had become *it*, its possessive form remained *his* (though sometimes unchanged *it*). It was not until the late sixteenth century that *his*, up till then shared by masculine and neuter, began to be restricted to mascu-

<sup>6</sup>*An* is from the short-voweled unstressed form of Old English *ān* ‘one.’ (Compare the use of the first numeral as indefinite article in other European languages, for example, German, French, Spanish, Italian.)



line reference and a new neuter possessive, *its*, was formed by analogy with the genitives of nouns. This new form does not appear at all in the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible (1611), which consistently uses *his* for the neuter. Probably Shakespeare did not use it either, at least as a written form, despite rare occurrences in the First Folio, published in 1623, seven years after his death. In the plays published up to the time of his death only *his* occurs.

Toward the end of the thirteenth century the forms of the second person singular (*thou, thee, thy, thine*) began to be more and more restricted to familiar use—lover to beloved, spouse to spouse, parent to child, master to servant. Among equals in sophisticated circles the plural forms in *y-* were used. The usage paralleled the practice of Continental languages and was specifically influenced by the French use of (sing.) *tu* and (pl.) *vous*. The historically singular *th-*forms became rare in fashionable usage by the sixteenth century and were completely lost in such usage in the eighteenth. Today they are used only by those who presumably speak on intimate terms with God, though they remain familiar to us all from their occurrence in the Authorized Version of the Bible and in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction of nominative *thou* and objective *thee* was generally maintained, though the *OED* cites instances, probably rather rare ones, of the nominative use of *thee*. In the historically plural *y-*forms—used, as we have just seen, for both numbers—the distinction of nominative *ye* and objective *you* was generally lost by the beginning of the seventeenth century, *you* being used for both functions and *ye* consequently going out of use altogether. The old case distinction is, however, observed by the translators of the Authorized Version, as in St. Paul's "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you . . ." (I Thess. iv.9); but other writers had been less careful from the fourteenth century on, some using the two forms more or less indiscriminately.

In the third person plural, Old English shows only forms beginning with *h* (*hī, hira, him*). These native *h-*forms, in various developments, remained in English for a long time; one of them, as we shall shortly see, has never left us. By the latter part of the fourteenth century, however, the originally Scandinavian *they*, coming down from the north where there had been heavy Scandinavian settlement, became widely current in that form of English spoken in London. Chaucer, whose usage may be taken as typical of that of the upper class, uses *they* for the nominative but not the other *th-*forms (*their, theirs, and them*), which were ultimately to prevail; his nonnominative

<sup>7</sup>The subtle artistic advantages of having at one's disposal distinctive singular and plural forms are demonstrated in William W. Evans' "Dramatic Use of the Second-Person Singular Pronoun in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Studia Neophilologica*, XXXIX (1967), 38-45.



forms are *her(e)* (or *hir[e]*), from Old English *hira*, for the possessive and *hem*, from Old English *him*, for the objective. *Hem* is still very much alive as an unstressed form; in the representation of informal speech it is written *'em*, which certainly indicates its Middle English pronunciation in unstressed position, in contrast to the pronunciation with /h/ when stressed.

There were also in Old English dual number pronoun forms in the first and second persons, but only those of the first person can be said to have survived the Old English period, and they dropped out of use early in the Middle English period, when people seemed to care no longer about what was once regarded as a vital distinction between 'we-two' (*wit*) and 'we-more-than-two' (*wē*) and proceeded to use the plural *wē* regardless of whether duality or plurality was concerned. Such "sloppiness" must have distressed the purists in the beginning, but by Chaucer's day the schoolmaster never missed those good old dual forms—indeed, had no knowledge that they ever existed, let alone that this precious distinction had once been an earmark of "good English."

*Who* and *whom* in their Old English forms (*hwā* and *hwām*) were exclusively interrogative; it was not until Modern English times that they came also to be used as relative pronouns, as in *the man who coughed* and *the man whom I mean*. Old English had an indeclinable particle *þe*, which served as relative-of-all-work, though the demonstratives were also used in this function. In Middle English the neuter demonstrative *that* (Old English *þæt*) came to be the usual relative. In early Modern English *which*, also exclusively interrogative in earlier times, came to be used as a relative pronoun, as in Claudius' "he which hath your Noble Father slaine, / Pursued my life" (*Hamlet* IV.vii.4-5). The usage is familiar to many from its occurrence in "Our father, which art in heaven . . . ."

## Exercise

9. Complete the following sentences by supplying an appropriate word or phrase for each blank.

1. Whereas the Modern English definite article *the* has a single form, the Old English equivalent had \_\_\_\_\_ different forms in the singular alone.
2. Old English adjectives had two declensions, called \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, whose use depended on whether or not the adjective was preceded by a demonstrative.
3. The suffix *-ly* is related to an Old English word *līc*, which meant \_\_\_\_\_ and was added to nouns to make \_\_\_\_\_ out of them.
4. Old English adverbs were formed from \_\_\_\_\_ by adding the suffix *-e*; when that final vowel became silent there was no longer

- any formal distinction between an adjective like *dēop* 'deep' and an \_\_\_\_\_ like *dēope*.
5. The words that have simplified their inflection least since Old English are the \_\_\_\_\_, which have in fact become somewhat more complex than they were.
  6. In Old English, the *thou/thee/thine* forms were regularly used in speaking to \_\_\_\_\_ (how many?) person(s).
  7. The older form of the word *it* was \_\_\_\_\_.
  8. The Scandinavian word *them* has replaced the native English form, except in unstressed positions, where the native form survives and may be written \_\_\_\_\_.
  9. Old English had special pronouns used in referring to exactly two persons, known as \_\_\_\_\_ number pronouns.
  10. *Who* and *whom* in their Old English forms (*hwā* and *hwām*) were exclusively \_\_\_\_\_; it was not until Modern English times that they came also to be used as relative pronouns.

## VERB FORMS

Compared with the noun and the adjective, the English verb has changed little since prehistoric times, if we leave out of consideration the increasing use of the so-called progressive tenses (for example, *I am playing*) in Modern English times, along with other expanded forms. Such expanded forms occur only now and again in Old English. The all but complete loss of the subjunctive—widely used in Old English in expressing wishes, commands, conditions, conjectures, and the like, though even these were often expressed as we express them, by the use of auxiliaries such as *will* and *may*—has been an important simplification.

Old English had a good many verbs that linguists call "strong"—those that can form their past tenses and past participles by an internal vowel change. This is an Indo-European heritage surviving, as far as verbs are concerned,<sup>8</sup> in fewer than eighty Modern English verbs, like *write/wrote/written*, *choose/chose/chosen*, *drink/drank/drunk*, *fight/fought/fought*, *steal/stole/stolen*, *eat/ate/eaten*, *shake/shook/shaken*, and *blow/blew/blown*. Such verbs, which are of very high frequency, fell into seven classes. To call them "irregular" verbs, as some do, is inaccurate. As we shall see from an examination of their development, there is really nothing irregular about them in the sense that *to be*, formed from several different roots, is irregular. There is nothing irregular, for instance, in the Modern English alternation of /aɪ/,

<sup>8</sup>Vowel gradation (ablaut) is not confined to the strong verbs but is most readily apparent in them.

/o/, and /ɪ/ in *write/wrote/written*; other verbs of the same class, like *drive*, *rise*, and *ride*, show the same regular alternation.

All forms of verbs may be inferred from what are called their principal parts. In Modern English grammar we cite for strong verbs three principal parts: the infinitive (*write*), the past tense (*wrote*), and the past participle (*written*). In “weak” verbs—those that add the dental suffix to form their past tense—the past participle is the same as the past tense form, for instance *walked*. For the anomalous *to be* it is necessary to cite two past forms, singular *was* and plural *were*. In most Old English strong verbs the vowel of the past plural form was differentiated from that of the singular, so that we must give four principal parts for such verbs. In Middle English there was considerable generalization of one or the other form throughout the past tense, but the situation during this transitional period is too far removed from our purposes to go into here. To illustrate the situation in Old English, as contrasted with Modern English, we cite two verbs of Class I in Old English and Modern English. The form cited for the Old English past singular is that of the first and third persons; the second person had the vowel of the plural.

| Old English                  | Modern English                          |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| INFINITIVE                   | INFINITIVE                              |
| rīdan, bītan                 | ride, bite                              |
| PAST TENSE SINGULAR          | PAST TENSE SINGULAR AND PLURAL          |
| rād, bāt                     | rode, bit                               |
| PAST TENSE PLURAL            |                                         |
| ridon, biton                 |                                         |
| PAST PARTICIPLE <sup>9</sup> | PAST PARTICIPLE                         |
| riden, biten                 | ridden, bitten (a spelling change only) |

Perhaps the most important development shown in these paradigms is the loss of one or the other of the older past tense forms in Modern English. In the anomalous verb *be* the folk have carried on the tendency toward reduction of two forms to one by using singular *was* throughout the past conjugation, thus *we was*, *you was*, *they was*. There is obviously nothing corrupt or un-English about so doing, but it is certainly unfashionable. Note, however, that if the number distinction in the past tense had survived in the strong verbs as it has in this badly mixed-up verb, we should have *I rode* but *we rid*, *I bote* but *we bit*, *I rose* but *we ris*, and so on. Such differ-

<sup>9</sup>The prefix *ge-*, becoming Middle English *i-*, *y-* (as in archaic *yclept* ‘called’) might occur in practically any Old English past participle and in some verbs throughout the conjugation. It occurred in other parts of speech also.

entiation would be precisely parallel to the variation between singular and plural past forms of *be* in Standard English. Note also that whereas in *ride* it is the old past singular *rād* that has survived in our *rode* for both numbers—the vowel change is perfectly regular—in *bite* it is the old past plural form *bit(on)* that we use. Past forms *rid* and *bote* did occur, however, well into the Modern English period. So did *ris*, *writ*, and *slode* (OE *slād*, past singular of *slīdan* ‘slide’).

Although, as we have just seen, either of the two past forms might win the day, in surviving Class I verbs the old singular forms have more often been retained, for instance, *abode* (also with a weak form *abided*), *drove*, *rose*, *shone*, *smote*, *strode*, *throve* (also with a weak form *thrived*), and *wrote*, in addition to the *rode* already cited. *Slid*, like *bit*, is a survival of the old past plural. *Dȳfan* ‘dip, immerse’ was weak in Old English; its modern development *dive* has acquired a variant past form *dove*, side by side with *dived*, by analogy with the Class I strong verbs.

We now examine the development of three verbs of Class III:

| Old English             | Modern English                 |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| INFINITIVE              | INFINITIVE                     |
| bindan, drincan, helpan | bind, drink, help              |
| PAST TENSE SINGULAR     | PAST TENSE SINGULAR AND PLURAL |
| band, dranc, healp      | bound, drank, helped           |
| PAST TENSE PLURAL       |                                |
| bundon, druncon, hulpon |                                |
| PAST PARTICIPLE         | PAST PARTICIPLE                |
| bunden, druncen, holpen | bound(en), drunk(en), helped   |

In verbs of this class like *bind*, with *nd* following the root vowel, the old past plural form is the one that survives as the general past form, for instance *found*, *ground*, *wound*. In verbs of the same class like *drink* and *swim*, in which the root vowel was not followed by *nd* or *mb* (for example, *climb*) the old past singular form with *a* may remain, as in *began*, *ran*, *sang*, *sank*, *shrank*, *sprang*, *stank*, and *swam*. (*Ring* is from a verb that was weak in Old English, but later came to be conjugated like the verbs just cited.) Other such verbs retain the past plural vowel, for instance, *clung*, *slung*, *slunk*, *spun*, *swung*, *won* (the *o* for *u* is merely a spelling convention), and *wrung*. *Climb* has become weak, though folk usage preserves a past form *clumb* from the old plural. *Help* likewise has acquired weak conjugation, but a strong past *holp* (with the vowel of the old past participle *holpen*) is still current in folk speech; the old participial form occurs in the Authorized Version, as in “He

hath holpen his servant Israel" (Luke i.54). The participial ending survives in *bounden* and *drunken* in the adjectival function: "bounden duty," "drunken sot."

Somewhat more than half of the Old English strong verbs have either been lost or have gone over into the weak, or **dental-suffix**, conjugation. In Class I practically all surviving verbs are still strong, but about fifty belonging to this class in Old English have been lost altogether. In Class III, other verbs that, like *help*, have become weak are *delve*, *melt*, *starve*, *swell* (whose old past participle *swollen* survives as an alternative form), *yell*, *yelp*, *yield*, and a number of others.

Verbs from other classes that have become weak include *brew*, *chew*, *sprout*, *crowd*, *suck*, *sup*, *shave*, *lose*, *shoot*, *fret*, *knead*, *weigh*, *wreak*, *bake*, *fare*, *gnaw*, *laugh*, *step*, *wade*, *wash*, *sleep*, *weep*, *flow*, *hew*, *leap*, *mow*, *sow*, and *wield*. The strong verbs have obviously fought a losing battle, so that just as the ending written *s* is our only living plural inflection, so the ending written (*e*)*d* (or *t* in some instances) is our only living past inflection. Even strong verbs when used in special senses take it; for instance, shoes are *shined*, criminals used to be *hanged*.

The Old English infinitive, as must have been noted, ended in *an* except for a few verbs like *sēon* 'see,' which had only *n*. These endings were lost in the course of the Middle English period, so that nowadays our only way of unmistakably indicating that a cited verb form is an infinitive is to precede it with the preposition *to*, which was originally no part of it whatsoever. The (*e*)*n* ending of the past participle of strong verbs frequently survives in Modern English, as in *written*, *stolen*, and *torn*, but not in *found*, *stood*, *fought*, and a good many others. The Modern English present participial ending in *ing* is from the Old English ending for the verbal noun; the Old English present participle ended in *ende*, a suffix that also occurred along with *ing* throughout the Middle English period.

The development of the personal endings of the verb is shown in the following conjugation in the indicative of a weak verb, Old English *dēman* and its Modern English development *deem*, in which archaic Modern English forms are italicized:

| Old English                 | Modern English            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| PRESENT INDICATIVE SINGULAR |                           |
| 1. dēme                     | 1. deem                   |
| 2. dēmest                   | 2. <i>deemest</i> , deem  |
| 3. dēmeð                    | 3. <i>deemeth</i> , deems |
| PRESENT INDICATIVE PLURAL   |                           |
| 1, 2, 3. dēmað              | 1, 2, 3. deem             |

## PAST INDICATIVE SINGULAR

|             |                              |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| 1, 3. dēmdē | 1, 3. deemed                 |
| 2. dēmdēst  | 2. <i>deemedest</i> , deemed |

## PAST INDICATIVE PLURAL

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1, 2, 3. dēmdon | 1, 2, 3. deemed |
|-----------------|-----------------|

In the present indicative plural the normal development of Old English *-að* is *-eth*, the ending which in fact occurs in the Middle English Southern dialect. In the third person present singular, *-as* occurs in Old English Northumbrian texts, becoming *-es* in the Northern dialect of Middle English. This ending spread to the Midland dialects, so that by the time of Shakespeare we encounter forms in both *-(e)th* and *-s*. Shakespeare himself uses both forms, but mostly that in *-s*; note the use of both in *Hamlet* I.i.160–63: “This bird of dawning singeth all night long . . . No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charme . . .” The Authorized Version, like the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, uses only *-(e)th* forms. *Hath* and *doth* survived far into the eighteenth century.

## Exercise

10. Give the past tense and past participle of the following Modern English verbs. How do the verbs in the first column differ from those in the second?

|          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. shave | 6. rise   |
| 2. bake  | 7. bite   |
| 3. wade  | 8. find   |
| 4. sleep | 9. swim   |
| 5. lose  | 10. swing |

A QUICK SURVEY OF IMPORTANT  
MIDDLE ENGLISH DEVELOPMENTS

In our rapid survey of English historical linguistics we have thus far said little specifically, but a good deal incidentally, about Middle English developments. As we have seen, it was during the Middle English period that grammatical gender was lost, in large part because of the reduction of final



unstressed vowels, which began long before 1100. The same change was responsible for the falling together of Old English *-es* and *-as* and has thus given us an identical genitive singular and general plural form—the latter, as we have seen, an extension of the older nominative-accusative plural form of the most prominent Old English declension.

Other sound changes, such as the rounding of Old English *ā*, the smoothing of the Old English diphthongs (for instance OE *dēop* ‘deep’/ ME *deep*, *geaf* ‘gave’/ *yaf*, *eorðe* ‘earth’/ *erthe*), and the simplification of certain consonant sequences (*hl*, *hn*, *hr*) have been alluded to. For our present purposes little remains to be said, except for a brief discussion of the various dialects of Middle English and the word stock of that period.

As for the first, it should be pointed out that the boundaries of the Old English dialectal regions shifted somewhat; nevertheless, Old English Northumbrian may be considered as corresponding somewhat roughly to Middle English Northern; Old English Mercian to Middle English East and West Midland; Old English West Saxon to Middle English Southern; and Old English Kentish to the identically named Middle English dialect. The East Midland area included London, which with the Norman Conquest supplanted Winchester in the old kingdom of Wessex as the seat of king and court. Modern Standard English is thus, largely for historical reasons, derived from that of the newer capital of London and the area in which it was situated. The form of English that has descended from the West Saxon speech of Alfred’s kingdom—and of most Old English literature that we know anything about—is not now spoken by educated people who stem from the area which comprised that kingdom. (By modern American standards London is not really very far from Winchester—only about sixty-five miles to the northeast of it.)

As has been pointed out (p. 315), the linguistic influence of the Norman Conquest was mostly a matter of our adopting words having to do with a new governmental administration—words like *government* and *administer* themselves, the latter refashioned from Old French *aministrer*, the *d* being supplied by Latin *ad*. Other examples are *parliament* (with a fancy spelling of Old French *parlement* ‘speaking’), *army*, *navy*, *realm*, *royal*, *authority*, and most titles of nobility (but not *earl*, *lord*, and *lady*). A different, but probably no less elegant, social life is reflected in words for articles of dress, precious stones, meals, and the like.

The period between 1250 and 1400 was the great period of French adoptions in English. Practically all of the words adopted during this century and a half have been thoroughly naturalized. We never, for instance, think of *charge*, *change*, *chase*, *chief*, and *marriage* as anything other than English words, though all have been taken from Old French and retain the Old French pronunciations of the sounds spelled *ch* and *ge*, in contrast to the

comparatively recent loans *chef* (a doublet of *chief*), *garage*, and *barrage*. Note also that *marriage*, like Anglo-Norman *carriage*, has acquired English stress, unlike the more recent disyllabic loans.

Many of the French loans merely replaced English words that would have done us just as well. *Despair* is no better than its English synonym *wanhope*, *army* no better than *ferd* or *dright*, *uncle* no better than *eam*. The English words cited are, however, lost to us and never will be missed. On the other side of the ledger, it might be argued that we are probably better off for having both French *ocean* and English *sea*, French *crime* and English *sin* and *guilt*, and scores of other such synonyms and near-synonyms.

There were other borrowings in the Middle English period that had nothing to do with the Norman Conquest. Hundreds of Latin words entered the language, most of them of a learned nature, like *index*, *library*, *medicine*, and *orbit*.

Among a number of Dutch words borrowed before 1500 are *booze*, *kit*, *pickle*, and *spool*. The American origin attributed to the first of these belongs to the realm of folklore; it cropped up again in 1967, at the time of the Johnson-Kosygin "summit conference" in Glassboro, New Jersey, whose previous claim to fame, according to a United Press dispatch of June 23, "was a pioneer glass industry which inadvertently introduced the word 'booze' into the American language" by producing bottles shaped like William Henry Harrison's log cabin birthplace that were filled with liquor by the "E. C. Booz company of Philadelphia." These bottles "became known as 'Booz bottles' and booze crept into the language as a synonym for liquor" (*Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 1967, Sec. 1, p. 2). One can view "the original Booz bottle, manufactured by E. C. Booz in 1854" (fourteen years after the Log Cabin Campaign of Harrison) in the Barton Museum of Whiskey History in Bardstown, Kentucky, according to *Newsweek* of October 11, 1965 (p. 100). According to yet another, and earlier, linguistic commentator, the distiller's name was not E. C. Booz, but E. G. Booze, and he bottled his whiskey not in bottles shaped like log cabins, but in glass replicas of his own distillery in Philadelphia.<sup>10</sup> Thus is linguistic nonhistory made. The word first occurs in English around 1300 and was later used as either verb or noun by Spenser (*Faerie Queene* I.iv.22), Thomas Nash, Sir John Harington, Robert Herrick, and a good many others who antedate Mr. E. C. Booz (or Mr. E. G. Booze) of Philadelphia. The account in the *OED* is fully documented.

The fairly numerous Arabic words having to do mainly with science or commerce (*cipher*, *cotton*, *almanac*, and *alkali*, for example) came into English not directly, but by way of French or Latin. The last two of those cited begin

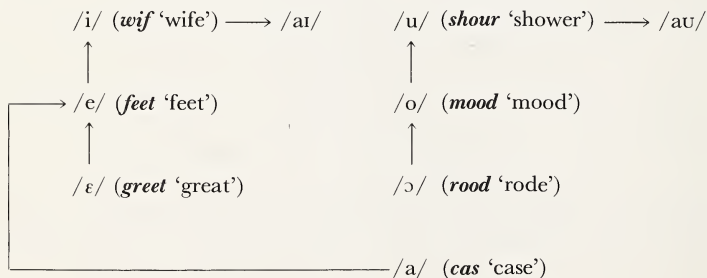
<sup>10</sup>Cedric Adams, in a column appearing in the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* and reprinted as an advertisement for that paper in the *New Yorker* of October 15, 1949.

with the Arabic definite article *al*, which is also the final syllable of the Latin-appearing *admiral*, with an inserted *d* because of confusion with Latin *admīrābilis* 'admirable,' with which Arabic *amir* 'commander, prince' has nothing to do.

## THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

The so-called Great Vowel Shift was a phenomenon that must have begun to manifest itself shortly before Chaucer's death in 1400 and that was still in progress long after the beginning of the Modern English period (more or less arbitrarily but traditionally set at about 1500). This phenomenon usually serves as a rough and ready means of demarcating Middle English from Modern English.

The Great Vowel Shift amounted to a raising—no man can tell why—of all the long vowels of Middle English except the two highest, *ī* and *ū*, which became diphthongs; *ā* was fronted as well. In the chart below, an illustrative Middle English word, without the usual diacritical markings to indicate length, has been supplied; the arrows show clearly what happened in this important development. Thus, omitting intermediate stages:



Unfortunately for the beginning student of Middle English, long close *e* /e/ and long open *e* /ε/ were written exactly the same, with *e* or *ee*; nor was there any distinction in writing between long close *o* /o/ and long open *o* /ɔ/, which were both written *o* or *oo*. The doubled symbols were more commonly used in later Middle English times; *ee* survives in the spelling of most Modern English words which previously had long close *e*, and *oo* is the usual spelling today for most words which had long close *o*. We customarily think of *oo* as symbolizing /u/ (or *u* in some words, like *book*, with

Modern English shortening, /ʊ/), though /u/ was never the Middle English value of *oo*. Words with Middle English long open *e*, typically becoming /e/ in the Great Vowel Shift, were later spelled *ea*, but this spelling now indicates /i/ in most words (*meat*, *seal*, *leak*, and the like), a pronunciation that may represent a divergent dialectal development of early Middle English long open *e* too complex to go into here. All such words, however, have had /e/ in Modern English, as many rimes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries testify—rimes such as Swift’s “Nor be thy mighty spirit rais’d, / Since Heaven and Cato both are pleas’d” (“Ode to Dr. William Sancroft,” Stanza XII) and Pope’s “In genial spring, beneath the quiv’ring shade, / Where cooling vapours breathe along the mead . . .” (*Windsor-Forest*, lines 135–36). But ultimately the /i/ development won out in the *ea* words, except for *great*, *steak*, *break*, and *yea*, to which may be added some Irish proper names such as *Yeats*, *O’Shea*, and *Reagan*.

The short vowels have changed very little since late Old English times. Middle English short /a/, as in *that* and *hand*, became /æ/ around 1500, and /ʊ/ in most words was unrounded to /ʌ/, as in *nut*, *gully*, and *much*, with the older value remaining in *put*, *full*, *bush*, and a few other words. Before *f*, *v*, and *m*, *al* became long /æ/, as in *calf*, *salve*, and *calm*, a vowel sound that remains in the first two examples in current Standard American English; there was a similar loss of /l/ before other consonants, as in *folk* and *Holmes*.

Important changes have occurred in the course of the Modern English period, but nothing really so radical and thoroughgoing as the Great Vowel Shift, which caused no changes in English spelling, but which separated that spelling, as far as the qualities symbolized by the letters were concerned, from the spelling of all the Continental languages. Most of these changes have already been discussed in the course of this chapter.

## Exercises

11. In each of the following pairs, one word was borrowed from French during the Middle English period, and the other is native English. Try to guess which is French and which native; then check yourself by looking in a dictionary.

- |                 |                   |                  |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. country/land | 6. mule/ox        | 11. cousin/kin   |
| 2. borrow/rent  | 7. large/small    | 12. meal/supper  |
| 3. lamp/light   | 8. city/town      | 13. collar/shirt |
| 4. rock/stone   | 9. blossom/flower | 14. beef/cow     |
| 5. corn/fruit   | 10. danger/fear   | 15. pork/swine   |

12. From what language was each of the following borrowed? Use a dictionary.

- |                      |                  |                    |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. amuck             | 18. goulash      | 35. skin           |
| 2. ante (poker term) | 19. hashish      | 36. sled           |
| 3. boomerang         | 20. jai alai     | 37. squash (gourd) |
| 4. boss (supervisor) | 21. juke (box)   | 38. swastika       |
| 5. buckra            | 22. kayak        | 39. taboo          |
| 6. cafeteria         | 23. kimono       | 40. tobacco        |
| 7. caste             | 24. kowtow       | 41. tom-tom        |
| 8. cherub            | 25. kumquat      | 42. tycoon         |
| 9. clan              | 26. lox (salmon) | 43. ukulele        |
| 10. cosmetic         | 27. mammoth      | 44. volcano        |
| 11. delta            | 28. mosquito     | 45. whisky         |
| 12. drape            | 29. pariah       | 46. yak (bovine)   |
| 13. easel            | 30. powwow       | 47. yam            |
| 14. flak             | 31. pundit       | 48. yodel          |
| 15. gape             | 32. robot        | 49. yogurt         |
| 16. gargoyle         | 33. safari       | 50. zombie         |
| 17. goober           | 34. schmo        | 51. zwieback       |

13. Some words have complex histories because they have passed through several languages before entering English. Trace the life history of the following words by looking up their etymologies in a dictionary.

1. canopy      2. howitzer      3. scarlet      4. jubilee      5. coffee

## AMERICAN ENGLISH

The first Englishmen to settle permanently in what they thought of as the New World spoke no differently from the way they had spoken in the various regions of England whence they came. American English thus began simply as earlier British English. Its development, if by development we mean change, is most noticeable in the American word stock. Familiar English words were put to new uses (*robin*, for the American bird that somewhat resembles the English bird so named), new compounds were formed (*backwoods*, for a topographical feature nonexistent in England), and Indian words were adopted for animals, plants, and artifacts never encountered in the mother country (*skunk*, *catawba*, *tomahawk*, and *eggplant*). Many English expressions that were archaic, or about to become so, in Standard British English, continued to have a hardy existence in America (*to loan*, *homely*

'unattractive,' *deck* 'pack of cards'), and new derivatives and adaptations came into being because they denoted things and institutions that were a part of the new way of life (*congressional, to scalp*).

In phonology and grammar, however, American English has been remarkably conservative. Its treatment of postvocalic /r/ in words like *far* and *farm* is, except for parts of the Atlantic coast, that of mid-eighteenth-century Standard British English; so is its retention of older /æ/ in *ask, path, dance*, and similar words in which the English have changed to /a/ (see Chapter 3, p. 81); so is its use of *gotten* as past participle, British English nowadays using only *got*, except in a few traditional expressions like *ill-gotten gains*. This is to give only a few instances; others are easy to find.

For the past half century or so, the study of American English has proceeded at a very lively pace—usually without much notion that in many respects it was a reflection of earlier British English. As early as 1889, the American Dialect Society was formed at Harvard for "the investigation of the English dialects in America with regard to pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, phraseology, and distribution"; its publication *Dialect Notes* ran from 1890 to 1939. Around 1905 a "chance encounter" with this publication and a realization of its riches led H. L. Mencken to a systematic study of American English, which culminated in the publication of his wondrous, if unfortunately titled, *The American Language*,<sup>11</sup> in 1919. The fourth edition of this work, "corrected, enlarged, and rewritten," appeared in 1936, with two supplements in 1945 and 1948. Though Mencken was not a scholar by training or profession—he would have scoffed at any such notion—his work is indispensable to the student of American English. It has been most happily abridged and revised by Raven I. McDavid, Jr. (New York, 1963), with the assistance in the chapter on slang, cant, and argot of David W. Maurer, an authority on the speech of those myriads of Americans who choose to live outside the law, or only slightly inside it.

During the war period from 1939 to 1944 there were no publications by the American Dialect Society. When publication resumed in 1944, the Society chose to call its new, and current, journal simply the *Publication of the American Dialect Society (PADS)*. A former president of the Society, Frederic G. Cassidy, is director of what, when completed, will be a monumental work, the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, referred to by the illuminati in modern acronymic fashion as *DARE*. Field work and preliminary editing are now being done. The project, with headquarters at the University of Wisconsin, is under the sponsorship of the American Dialect Society.

Work on the great *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada* began under

<sup>11</sup> The title of George Philip Krapp's important *The English Language in America* (New York, 1925) is happier. To refer to the American variety of English as "the American language" is comparable to speaking of Cuban Spanish as "the Cuban language."



the directorship of Hans Kurath in 1931. Kurath and a staff of highly trained field workers have made a systematic survey of American English in a large number of carefully selected communities in every region of the United States—carefully selected on the basis of their settlement history as well as of their economic and cultural history. The present director of the *Atlas* is Raven I. McDavid, Jr.; its vast collection of data, which include tape recordings as well as transcribed interviews, repose in McDavid's office at the University of Chicago, where ambulation is hazardous because of the sheer bulk of the materials. Thus far only the New England materials have been published, as *The Linguistic Atlas of New England* (Providence, R.I., 1939-43); the volumes, with their many linguistic maps showing the distribution of features of New England speech, are almost too bulky for an aging scholar to manage. Important works based upon the materials collected for the Atlantic states have appeared. One of these, Kurath's *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1949) should bury for all time the old notion that northern and southern American speech were separated by a sort of linguistic Mason-Dixon line not extending very far west, and that all other types of American English could be lumped together as "General American." As Kurath demonstrates, there is a well-defined midland area, lying between north and south.

Two other major works dealing with American English are the four-volume *Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles* (Chicago, 1938-44), edited by Sir William Craigie (a Scotsman who was one of the last generation of editors of the *OED*) and James R. Hulbert, and the *Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Chicago, 1951), edited by M. M. Mathews, the latter a work restricted to "those words and meanings of words which have been added to the English language in the United States" (p. v), whereas the scope of the *Dictionary of American English* was considerably greater, including words for one reason or another in wider use in America than in England, but limited by its cut-off dates—1900 for the general vocabulary and 1875 for slang. In addition to the materials already cited, there is a very lively learned journal devoted to the study of American English and appropriately named *American Speech*. It was founded by Mencken and others.

There is reason for regarding American English not as an independent development as far as phonology and grammar are concerned, but as a somewhat retarded form of older Standard British English. To say so may be a blow to American linguistic patriotism as well as to British linguistic arrogance. The facts seem to indicate unmistakably that American English has been on the whole conservative, whereas the really striking changes—again leaving word usage out of the question—have occurred in British English.

The recent and surprisingly great impact of American English upon British English on the level of vocabulary has been greater than anyone thought

possible when, in the Preface to his fourth edition, Mencken predicted, with considerable exaggeration, that British English would in time become “a kind of dialect of American” (p. vi); he already realized, however, that his prediction of 1919 that American and British English might in time become mutually unintelligible was untenable.

The impact of American English upon British English, which is certainly not likely to become “a kind of dialect of American,” has nevertheless been surprisingly great. An English writer who knows American English well, Brian Foster, has written illuminatingly upon the matter in an article “Recent American Influence on Standard English” (by which he means Standard British English), published in *Anglia*, LXXIII (1956), 328–57. More recently Foster, whose academic specialty is French rather than English, has written informatively and stylishly upon the same subject in the first chapter of his *The Changing English Language* (New York and London, 1968).

When all is said and done, however, there can be no doubt that British English and American English are coming closer together, though they have never been so far apart as might be expected. There is no place in today’s world for linguistic provincialism. Americans are not likely to substitute *lorry* for *truck*, but any American who does not know the British term must be adjudged somewhat provincial. Equally naive is the Englishman who is nowadays unaware that Americans use *gasoline* (or just *gas*) rather than *petrol* to stoke their cars; and so is anyone else who supposes that there is any particular importance or virtue in making either choice.

## Exercise

14. Mark each of the following statements about the history of English *T* for true or *F* for false.

1. Historical linguistics traces a language back to its earliest written records, but no further.
2. The earliest written records of English date from the seventh century A.D.
3. Historical linguists have proved that all the languages of Europe and Asia developed from a single source.
4. English is one of a group of languages called Germanic.
5. English *father* and Latin *pater*, which look quite different, are actually related developments of the same source-word.
6. English was brought to the British Isles in the mid fifth century as the language of settlers from the continent.
7. The most important foreign influence on Old English was the Celtic speech of the conquered Britains.

8. The importance of the Scandinavian influence on English can be seen in the fact that the pronouns *they*, *their*, and *them* were borrowed from the Northmen's language.
9. The Norman Conquest brought civilizing culture to the barbarous English.
10. Pronunciation and spelling were closer together in Old English than they are in Modern English.
11. Old English had a more elaborate inflectional system than that of Modern English.
12. Gender of Old English nouns was based on the sex of the thing named.
13. In Old English, demonstratives and adjectives had various forms depending on the number, gender, and case of the noun they modified.
14. Strong and weak verbs are distinguished by the kind of meaning they have.
15. Modern Standard English is derived from the language of Winchester, the capital of Alfred's kingdom.
16. Most French loan-words borrowed during the Middle English period remain distinctly foreign in our vocabulary.
17. The pronunciation of English in Chaucer's day was approximately the same as ours.
18. As a result of the Great Vowel Shift, the pronunciation of all the long vowels changed between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.
19. In pronunciation and grammar, American English has been highly innovative, although its vocabulary has resisted change.
20. Standard American and Standard British English, which have never been very different, seem to be coming closer together.

# INDEX



/a/, 11, 57, 77, 80–81, 119, 316,  
     336–37  
 /æ/, 10, 56–57, 76–77, 81, 119, 316,  
     337  
 /aɪ/, 56, 73, 81–82, 336  
 /au/, 56, 82, 336  
**a, an**, 103  
 ablaut, 329<sub>n</sub>  
**-able**, 157  
**about**, 117  
 accusative case, 320  
 acronym, 111–13  
 active voice, 172, 255  
 activity factor, 199<sub>n</sub>  
 acute accent, 67  
*ad baculum* fallacy, 291  
*ad captandum vulgus* fallacy, 287–89  
**adagio**, 87  
**Adam, atom**, 116  
 Adams, Cedric, 335<sub>n</sub>  
**adder**, 66  
 Addison, Joseph, 25  
 adjective, 157–58, 165–66, 325; and  
     relative clause, 147; and verb, 149–  
     50, 165

adjoining transformation, 140  
 adverb, 157–58, 166–67, 325; of  
     degree, 157; of frequency, 167; of  
     manner, 160, 167; of place, 167; of  
     time, 167; negative, 167; sentence,  
     160, 167  
 Aeolic Greek, 306  
 affirmative proposition, 268  
 affix, 99, 155  
 affricate, 60–61  
 Afrikaans, 306  
**Afro-American**, 228  
 age dialect, 203  
**AID**, 112  
**ain't**, 22  
 Albanian, 305, 307  
**albeit**, 231  
 Alford, Henry, 31  
 Alfred the Great, 12, 313, 316  
 Algeo, John, 25<sub>n</sub>, 43<sub>n</sub>, 70<sub>n</sub>  
 allegory, 253  
 alliteration, 243–44  
 allomorph, 103–06, 219  
 allophone, 54, 56  
 alphabet, 70, 316



- Altaic languages, 305  
*alumna, alumnae*, 73  
*alumnus, alumni*, 73  
 alveolar consonant, 60  
 alveolar ridge, 59–60  
 amalgamated compound, 3; *see also*  
     fused compound  
 ambiguity, 218, 220–22, 292–95;  
     structural, 159, 162–63, 180  
 amelioration, 227–28  
*amen*, 119  
 American Dialect Society, 339  
 American English, 10, 12–13, 16, 41,  
     72, 338–41; and British English,  
     340–41  
 American Indian “writing,” 70  
*Amherst*, 90  
*Amerind*, 113  
*ammo*, 113  
*amoeba*, 74  
*among, between*, 50  
*ampersand*, 108  
 amphiboly, 292  
 analogical sign, 97  
 analogical word, 108  
 analogy-pressing fallacy, 285  
 analytic proposition, 263  
 anapestic meter, 248  
 anaptyxis, 118*n*  
 anatomy and speech, 16  
*and*, 106  
 Anglo-Frisian, 306  
 Anglo-Norman, 71, 335  
 Anglo-Saxon, *see* Old English  
 animal communication, 52–53  
 animate noun, 166  
*annex, annexe*, 86  
*another*, 113  
 antecedent, 148  
*Anthony*, 85  
*anti-*, 82  
 anticlimax, 257  
*antiquer*, 110  
*Antony*, 85  
 antonym, 129, 223–25  
*anybody . . . their*, 35  
 apheresis, 117*n*  
 aphasis, 117*n*  
 apocope, 117*n*  
 apostrophe, 82, 321  
 appositive, 147  
 Arabic, 107, 335–36  
 Aramaic, 303  
 arbitrary sign, 97  
 archaic word, 121–22, 129  
*arctic*, 105  
*are, or*, 80  
*area*, 76  
 argument, 266  
*argumentum ad hominem* fallacy, 287  
*argumentum ad ignorantiam* fallacy, 282  
 Aristotle, 194  
 Armenian, 305, 307  
 Arnauld, Antoine, 195  
 Arnold, Matthew, 240  
 article, 324  
*as, like*, 41  
*ask*, 118  
 aspect, 308  
 aspiration, 54  
 assimilation, 104, 116  
 association, 196, 198–202, 249–50;  
     change of, 227–29; fallacy, 288  
 assonance, 244–45  
*asthma*, 88  
*ate*, 76  
*-ate*, 99  
*athletic*, 118  
*atom, Adam*, 116  
*atomitat*, 111  
 attributive adjective, 165  
 Augustine, Saint, 70, 309, 311  
*aunt*, 77  
 Austen, Jane, 23  
*author*, 4  
 authorities, misuse of, 289–91  
 Authorized Version, 32–33, 327,  
     331–33  
*auto, Otto*, 80  
*Avon*, 312  
*AWOL*, 112  
*ax, axe*, 86  
*axes*, 74  
*axis, axes*, 74

- /b/, 60, 84, 104, 317  
 back formation, 114  
 back vowel, 56–57  
*backwoods*, 338  
 Bacon, Francis, 23, 193  
 Baker, Sheridan, 50*n*  
 ballad stanza, 258  
*ballute*, 111  
 Baltic languages, 304, 307  
 Balto-Slavic languages, 307  
*Band-Aid*, 230  
 bandwagon fallacy, 288  
 Bantu, 107  
*Barnett*, 308*n*  
*barrel*, 76  
 Baruch, Bernard, 77  
*base, bases*, 74  
 base morpheme, 99  
 base rules, 176  
*bash*, 107  
 basic meaning, 218, 249  
*basis, bases*, 74  
 Basque, 305  
*bathroom bowl*, 42  
*be*, 33; *see also been, you was*  
*bear*, 76  
 Beardsley, Monroe, 233*n*  
*Beauchamp*, 74  
*Beaulieu*, 75  
*because*, 117  
 Bede, Saint, 309–10  
*Beecham*, 74  
 Beecher, Henry Ward, 47  
*beef*, 191  
*been*, 74–75  
*beersicle*, 114  
 begging-the-question fallacy, 283  
*behavior pattern*, 42  
 behaviorism and meaning, 185  
*be-in*, 109  
 Bengali, 307  
*Beowulf*, 252  
*between, among*, 50  
*Bewley*, 75  
 Bierce, Ambrose, 123  
 big-lie fallacy, 283  
 big-stick fallacy, 291  
*bike*, 48, 113  
*bikini*, 227  
 bilabial consonant, 60  
*bin*, 312  
*bird*, 118; pronounced “boid,” 77  
*Birmingham*, 89  
*biscuit*, 202  
*black*, 228  
*blackboard*, 101  
 Blake, William, 240, 250  
 blank verse, 259  
 blend, 110–11  
*bless it*, 202  
*bloody*, 201  
*blooming*, 202  
*B'nai B'rith*, 82  
*bobolink*, 107  
*bodkin*, 199  
*boil*, 24  
 Bolingbroke, 25  
*bomb, bombard, bomber*, 104  
*boom*, 107  
*booze*, 17, 335  
*Borgia*, 119  
*borough*, 78  
 borrowing, 107; *see also* loan words  
 Boswell, James, 32  
 bound morpheme, 99–100, 102  
 Bowen, J. Donald, 11*n*  
*bra*, 43  
 Bradley, Henry, 90  
 branches in a tree diagram, 134  
*break down* ‘analyze,’ 27  
*breakfast*, 108  
*breakthrough*, 27, 42  
*breast*, 201–02  
*breeches*, 4  
 Breton, 304, 307  
 breve, 67  
*bridegroom*, 227  
*brimstone*, 108  
 British English, 39, 72; and American English, 340–41  
 broad reference, 293; *see also* diverse reference  
 Brooks, Van Wyck, 10  
 Brown, John Mason, 35, 254

- Bryan, William Jennings, 251  
 Bryant, Margaret M., 37  
*Buckingham*, 89  
 Buddha, 301  
 Bulgarian, 304–05, 307  
*bull in a china shop*, 101  
 Bunyan, John, 253  
*bureaucracy*, 81  
*burgle*, 114  
*burp*, 107  
*bust*, 230  
 Butler, Samuel, 291  
*butte*, 79  
*buxom*, 226  
*bygone*, 101  
 Byron, George Gordon, Lord, 23, 258  
  
 /č/, 60–61, 62*n*, 91, 104, 317  
*Caesar*, 74  
 caesura, 247  
*camellia*, 73  
 Campbell, George, 24–25  
*can*, 'be able,' 'preserve,' 57; and *may*,  
     50; *see also can't hardly*  
 Canterbury, Archbishop of, 47–48  
*can't hardly*, 50  
*capercailzie*, 93  
 card-stacking fallacy, 285–86  
*carpenter*, 114  
 Carroll, Lewis, 123–24, 161–62, 209,  
     248, 262*n*, 277*n*  
*carrot*, 76  
*cashmere*, 87  
 Cassidy, Frederic G., 339  
 casual style, 204  
*catawba*, 338  
*catch*, 76, 105  
 categories of grammar, 182  
 category-and-scale grammar, 182  
 Catford, J. C., 202*n*  
*catsup*, 76  
 causative clause, 172  
 cause in logic, 281–82  
 Cawdrey, Robert, 124–25  
 Caxton, William, 32  
 Cecil, Lord David, 32  
  
*-ceive*, 102  
 Celtic languages, 304, 306, 312  
 central vowel, 56–57  
*cents, sense*, 117  
*centum* languages, 306  
*chaise longue*, 119  
 Chambers, R. W., 32  
 Chapin, Miriam, 4*n*, 7  
*charisma*, 8  
*chartreuse*, 77  
*Chatham*, 88  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32,  
     36, 78, 116, 121, 252, 258, 324,  
     327–28, 336  
*cheese*, 311  
*chest*, 201–02  
*chiaroscuro*, 86  
 chiasm, 257  
*child*, 117  
*children*, 323  
 Chinese, 8, 76, 305  
 Chinook, 187  
*Cholmondeley*, 78  
 Chomsky, Noam, 181, 182*n*  
*chthonian*, 88  
 Churchill, Sir Winston, 31–32, 246,  
     257, 289  
*Cincinnati*, 82  
 circular-argument fallacy, 283  
 circumflex accent, 67  
*Cirencester*, 75  
 citations, dictionary, 128  
*clang*, 107  
 clang association, 226, 287  
*clapboard*, 4  
 Clark, John W., 13*n*, 14*n*, 16*n*  
 class, grammatical, 182  
 class-designators in language, 30,  
     39–46  
 clause structure, 169–74  
*CLEAN*, 112  
 climate and speech, 15–16  
 climax, 257  
 clipping, 113  
 close transition, 66  
*clothes*, 87  
*Cloyd*, 92

- Cnut, 313  
 Cobbett, William, 34–35  
*cockroach*, 119  
 cognate word, 305  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 248, 258  
 collateral adjective, 129  
 collocation, 198  
 colloquial style, 47–49, 128  
 colloquialism, 47  
*colonel*, 77  
 color terms, 189, 198, 213  
*colored*, 228  
 combining form, 127  
*come*, 78; *see also he come, had came, come a cropper*  
*come a cropper*, 48  
*Comintern*, 112  
 commonization, 230  
 comparison, of adjective, 165, 325; of adverb, 325  
 complementary distribution, 54–55  
 complement, 140, 149–50, 152, 165–66, 170–72  
*complex*, 231  
 compound, 108–10; spelling of, 109–10, 126–27  
*compulsive drinker*, 42  
*Comsat*, 112  
*con-*, 102  
 conceit, 253  
 conceptual structure, 138  
 conclusion of argument, 268  
*congratulation*, 43  
*congressional*, 339  
 conjugation, 157  
 conjunction, 157  
 conjunctive adverb, 157  
*Connecticut*, 85  
 connotation, *see* association, nuance  
 consonance, 244–45  
 consonant, 54, 58–61; spelling of, 84–94  
 consultative style, 204  
*contact* (*vb.*), 28, 230  
 content, of sign, 97; and deep structure, 138–39  
*contents*, 16  
 context, and meaning, 186–87; definition by, 210–11; linguistic, 226; situational, 187; verbal, 187  
 contextual variants in pronunciation, 103–04  
 contradictory, 223  
 contrary, 223  
*cookie*, 196, 198  
*cookout*, 109  
*coomb*, 312  
 coordination, 255–56  
 Cornish, 306  
 corruption, *see* degeneration of language  
*COT*, 112  
*count one's chickens before they're hatched*, 101  
 countable noun, 166  
 couplet, 257  
*courage*, 78  
*couth*, 121  
*cow*, 191; *see also kine*  
*crag*, 312  
 Craigie, Sir William, 340  
*CRASH*, 112  
 crossed *d* (*ḏ*), 71  
*crunch*, 107  
 cultural level, 47  
 currency label, 128–29  
*cutthroat*, 108  
 Czecho-Slovak, 304, 307  
  
 /*d*/, 60, 84, 91, 104, 317  
 /*ḏ*/, 60–61, 86–87, 317–19  
 dactylic meter, 248  
 Daggett, Windsor P., 10  
 Daley, Richard, 257  
*Dalziell*, 93  
 Danish, 93, 305–07  
*danseuse*, 77  
*DARE*, 112  
*dark meat*, 201  
 Darwin, Charles, 32  
*data*, 119  
*date*, 99  
 dative case, 320, 324

- dative- instrumental case, 321–22  
*daughter, dotter*, 80  
*-day*, 75  
*de-*, 102  
*deck*, 339  
 Declaration of Independence, 266  
 declarative clause, 172  
 declension, 157; Old English, 320–28  
 deductive argument, 269  
 deep structure, 138–43, 176–80  
*deer*, 226; (*plural*), 322  
*defense, fence*, 117  
 definite relative clause, 148  
 definition, 208–15, 297; dictionary, 128  
 degeneration of language, 13–14, 23, 29  
 deleting transformation, 140, 170–72  
 delicacy of description, 167–68, 176; scale of, 182  
 demonstrative pronoun, 148, 324  
 dendritic diagram, 134*n*  
 denotation, *see* sense, basic meaning  
 dental consonant, 60  
 dental suffix, *see -ed*, weak verbs  
*dentures*, 41  
 derivation, 110  
 derivational affix, 155  
 derivative word, 110, 129  
 descriptive definition, 208  
*detoxification*, 110  
*deuce*, 202  
 diacritical marking, 71  
 dialect, 202–03, 339; Middle English, 316, 334; Old English, 309–10, 316, 334; regional, 1, 9–10, 15, 45, 105, 129; borrowing, 230  
 Dickens, Charles, 32, 261  
 diction, 249–51, 292–95; *see also* vocabulary  
 dictionary, 106, 123–32  
 differentiae, 211  
 digraph, 71  
 dilemma, 300–01  
 dimensions of meaning, 196–207  
 dimeter, 257  
 diminished primary stress, 67–68  
*diphthong*, 116  
 diphthong, 56  
 directive language, 235–36  
*disambiguate*, 110  
*dish*, 311  
*disinterested*, 27, 209  
*dissect*, 40  
 dissimilation, 116–17  
 distinctive sound, 54–55  
 distributed term, 270, 298  
 diverse reference, 221–22; *see also* broad reference  
 diversion fallacy, 299  
*divvy*, 113  
*do*, 159; *see also he don't, don't it?*  
 Dodgson, Charles, *see* Carroll, Lewis  
*don*, 108  
 Donne, John, 251, 253  
*don't it?*, 33  
 Doric Greek, 306  
*dotter, daughter*, 80  
 double acute accent, 68  
 double negative, 8, 21–24, 28, 43  
*dove*, 200  
*DNA*, 111  
*drinking problem*, 42  
*drive*, 231  
*dropout*, 109  
 “dropping *g*,” 9–10, 15, 24, 91  
*drugstore*, 187  
 Dryden, John, 14, 244  
 dual number, 328  
*-duce*, 102  
*dumbwaiter*, 101  
 Dunsany, Edward John, Lord, 274*n*  
 Dutch, 8, 14, 306, 335  
*Dutch treat*, 110  
 Dykema, Karl W., 23*n*, 37  
  
 /e/, 57, 75–76, 316, 336–37  
 /ɛ/, 57, 73, 75–76  
 /ɜ/, 57, 77–78  
 /ə/, 57, 62, 74–75, 82–83  
*ear*, 226  
 East Germanic, 306–07  
*Eastham*, 88

- eat*, 190–91; *see also ate*  
 Ebbitt, Wilma R., 29*n*, 37, 48*n*, 126  
 echoic word, 98, 107–08  
*-ed*, 84–85, 104, 106  
*edh*, 87  
*edit*, 114  
*educator*, 105  
 Edward the Confessor, 313  
*egg*, 105, 313  
*eggplant*, 338  
 Egyptian writing, 70  
 Eisenhower, Dwight David, 32, 289  
*either/or* fallacy, 300–01  
*eke*, 121  
 Elberfeld horses, 274*n*  
 Eliot, T. S., 252, 254  
 Elizabeth II, queen of England, 32  
*Eltham*, 88  
 embedding, 143–53, 172  
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 244  
 emic difference, 181  
 emotional-appeal fallacy, 287–89  
 emotional association, 199  
 empirical statement, 264  
*empty*, 117  
 empty morpheme, 159  
*encyclop(a)edia*, 74  
 end-stopped line, 247  
*Englishman*, 100  
*enthuse*, 114  
 enthymeme, 275  
*envelope*, 81  
*envoy*, 81  
 epenthesis, 117*n*  
 epiglottis, 59  
 equivocation fallacy, 293  
*-er*, 325  
*escalate*, 27; and *scale*, 118  
*escalator*, 230  
 Eskimo, 107  
 esophagus, 59  
*especial*, *special*, 118  
*espouse*, *sponsor*, 118  
*esprit*, *spirit*, 118  
*-est*, 325  
*establish*, *stabile*, 118  
*estate*, *status*, 118  
 esthetics and language, 8–11, 241  
 Estonian, 305  
*eth*, 87  
 Ethelred the Unready, 313  
 etic difference, 181  
 etymological fallacy, 294  
 etymology, 122, 129; fanciful, 17  
 euphemism, 41–42, 201–02  
 evaluative factor, 199*n*  
 Evans, Bergen and Cornelia, 37  
 Evans, William W., 327*n*  
*everybody* . . . *they*, *them*, 35, 50  
*Evesham*, 89  
 evidence, logical, 271; insufficient, 278–84; wrong, 284–92  
 evocative language, 235–36  
*ex-*, 100  
*exam*, 48  
 example, definition by, 211  
 exclamation, 157, 173  
*executary*, 111  
 expletive, 157  
 explosive sound, 60  
 exponence scale, 182  
 exposition, 266  
 expression, of sign, 97; and surface structure, 138–39; *see also* allomorph  
 expressive language, 234, 236  
 extraposing, 149–52  
*extrovert*, 231  
 eye-rime, 244  
  
 /f/, 60–61, 72, 88, 104, 317–19  
 Fadiman, Clifton, 44  
*falcon*, 81  
 fallacy, 269  
 false-cause fallacy, 281–82  
*fan*, 113  
*farm*, *form*, 80  
*fat-in*, 109  
*Fa(u)lkner*, 81  
 Faulkner, William, 241, 255*n*  
*fault*, 92  
*feckless*, 100  
*federal*, 117  
*feet*, 303–04, 322



- fence*, 113; and *defense*, 117  
*-fer*, 102  
 field label, 129  
 figure of speech, 252–53  
*film*, 118  
*finalize*, 28, 42  
*-fine*, 102  
 finite clause, 256*n*  
 Finnish, 305  
 Finno-Ugric languages, 305  
*firetrap*, 101  
 first stress, 67  
*fishwich*, 114  
 Fitzgerald, Edward, 247  
*flee*, *fled*, 104  
 Flemish, 306  
*flesh*, 191  
*Floyd*, 92  
*Fluellen*, 92  
*flurry*, 78, 111  
*folk*, 323  
 folk etymology, 119, 226–27  
 folk-wisdom fallacy, 279  
 Follett, Wilson, 52*n*  
*foot*, 190; *see also feet*  
 foot, metrical, 257  
*for*, *four*, 79  
*forehead*, 3–4  
*-form*, 102  
*form*, *farm*, 80  
 formal definition, 211–13  
 formal style, 47–49, 128, 204  
*formula*, *formulae*, 73  
 Forster, E. M., 32, 192  
 Foster, Brian, 341  
*four*, *for*, 79  
 Fowler, H. W., 32, 37  
 Francis, W. Nelson, 158*n*  
 free morpheme, 99–100  
 free variation, 54–55  
 free verse, 260  
 free word order, 155  
 French, 9, 14, 56, 71, 73–74, 76–77,  
     87, 91, 94, 107, 110, 119, 187, 228,  
     304, 306, 308*n*, 315–16, 326*n*, 327,  
     334–35  
 fricative, 60–61  
 Fries, C. C., 35  
 Frisian, 306  
*frog*, 105  
 front vowel, 56–57  
 frozen style, 204  
*fruesta*, 111  
*fry-pan*, 108  
*fubar*, 112  
*-ful*, 99  
 full stress, 67  
 function word, 157  
 functional shift, 28, 157, 229–30  
 functional variety, 47, 128  
 functions of language, 233–38  
*fungus*, *fungi*, 73  
 fused compound, 108, 114; *see also*  
     amalgamated compound  
 Fyvel, T. R., 7  
  
 /g/, 60, 84, 313–14, 317  
 Gaelic, 304, 306  
 Gallic, 306  
 Galsworthy, John, 32  
*game*, 117  
*gaol*, 90  
*garage*, 119  
*gasoline*, 341  
 general semantics, 279  
 general term, 268  
 generalization, 225, 278–81  
 generative grammar, 176  
 generative-transformational theory,  
     176–81  
 genitive case, 320–24, 334; of pro-  
     nouns, 326  
 genre, 260  
 genteelism, 202  
 genus, 211  
 geographical dialect, 202–03; *see also*  
     dialect, regional  
 George VI, king of England, 31  
 German, 7–8, 11, 14, 55*n*, 60, 62, 72,  
     93, 111*n*, 187, 190–91, 226, 230,  
     241, 306, 316, 319, 325, 326*n*  
 Germanic languages, 14, 16, 303–08  
 Germanic writing, 70

- gerund construction, 152, 172  
*get along*, 101  
*get out of the wrong side of the bed*, 101  
**GI**, 111  
*gift*, 313–14  
 Gilbert, W. S., 23, 33  
*gild the lily*, 198*n*  
*girl, girls*, 99  
*give*, 313  
*give someone the bum's rush*, 101  
 glittering-generalizability fallacy, 279  
 glottal consonant, 60  
 glottis, 61  
*go*, 190; *see also have went*  
*go in one ear and out the other*, 101  
*Goethe*, 77–78  
 golden-mean fallacy, 301–02  
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 32  
 Goldwater, Barry, 289  
*googol*, 107  
*goose, geese*, 304, 323  
**GOP**, 111  
*goshdarn*, 48, 202  
*Gotham*, 88  
 Gothic, 303–07  
*gotten*, 339  
*Göttingen*, 77  
*government*, 91, 104–05  
*governor*, 117  
 Gowers, Sir Ernest, 31*n*, 32, 37  
*grammar*, 293  
 grammar, 7–8, 96, 133–82; and the dictionary, 127–28; and literature, 254–57, 260  
 grammatical function, 196, 202, 249; change of, 229–30; *see also* functional shift  
 grammatical gender, 319, 324, 333  
 grammatical meaning, 158  
 grammatical structure, 138  
 grammatical word, 109  
 grave accent, 67  
 Graves, John Temple, 9–10  
*grease*, 105  
 Great Vowel Shift, 71, 116, 336–37  
 Greck, 8, 12, 14*n*, 55, 62*n*, 84–85, 88–89, 107, 303–06, 308; alphabet, 70–71  
*Greenwich*, 74  
 Grimm's Law, 307  
*guesstimate*, 111  
*guest*, 229  
*guimpe*, 76  
*gulp*, 107  
 “guttural” sound, 11, 241  
*gym*, 113  
 Gypsy, 227, 305; *see also* Romany
- /h/, 4, 60–61, 89–90, 94, 317  
*had*, 84  
*had came*, 48  
*hair*, 76  
 half stress, 67  
*halitosis*, 42  
 Halliday, M. A. K., 182  
*halve, have*, 57  
*-ham*, 88–89  
*handbook*, 230  
*handkerchief*, 91  
*hangnail*, 119  
 hard palate, 59  
 Harder, Jayne Crane, 10*n*  
 Hardicanute, 313  
 Hardy, Thomas, 32  
 Harington, Sir John, 335  
*harlot*, 228  
 Harold Harefoot, 313  
 Harris, James, 20  
 Harrison, William Henry, 335  
 Hastings, Battle of, 315  
 hasty-generalization fallacy, 278–82  
*have*, 90; and *halve*, 57; *see also had have saw*, 48  
*have went*, 28, 40, 43  
 Hawaiian, 10  
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 32, 254  
*he, him, his*, 90, 117; *see also himself*  
*he come*, 43, 48  
*he seen*, 48  
*he don't*, 23–25  
*heath*, 121  
*heavens*, 202

- Hebrew, 7, 62, 93, 306  
*height*, 210  
 heightened primary stress, 68  
 Hellenic languages, 306  
 Hemingway, Ernest, 255*n*  
 Hengest, 310  
*Henry*, 118  
*HEP*, 112  
 heptameter, 257  
*her*, *see she*  
 Herrick, Robert, 251, 335  
*HEW*, 112  
 hexameter, 257  
*hibachi*, 62  
*hiccup*, 98, 107  
 hierarchical structure, 133–37, 260  
 hieroglyphics, 70  
 High German, 305–06, 314  
 high vowel, 56–57  
 Hindi, 307  
*hisselt*, 43  
 historical dialect, 203  
 historical linguistics, 303  
 Hittite, 303, 305, 307  
*hoarse*, *horse*, 80  
 Hockett, Charles F., 52  
 Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 35*n*  
*holt*, 121–22  
*homely*, 338  
*homogenized*, 118  
 homograph, 127, 219*n*  
 homonym, 219–21, 251, 292  
 homophone, 219*n*  
*honegar*, 111  
 Hood, Thomas, 248  
 Hopi, 193–94  
 Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 242  
 Horace, 239  
 Horsa, 310  
*horse* (*pl.*), 322–23; and *hoarse*, 80  
*host*, 4, 119  
*hostel*, 4  
*hotel*, 89  
*house*, *houses*, 104  
 Howells, William Dean, 10  
 Hughes, Thomas, 23  
 Hulbert, James R., 340  
 human noun, 166  
*humble*, 89  
*humor*, 4, 89  
 Humpty Dumpty, 209  
 Hungarian, 305  
 Hunt, Leigh, 74, 247  
*hushpuppy*, 203  
*hussy*, 108  
 Huxley, Thomas Henry, 31  
 hyperbole, 252  
 hypercorrectness (affected, artificial, hyperurban, overcareful, overcorrect pronunciation, overteaching, platform speech), 24, 41, 74, 80–82, 87, 119  
 hypostatization fallacy, 294  
 hypothesis, 265, 271  
  
 /i/, 57, 73–74, 316, 336–37  
 /ɪ/, 56–57, 74–75, 82  
*I*, *me*, 31–32; *see also my*, *mine*  
 iambic meter, 246  
 Icelandic, 14, 306–07, 318*n*  
*icicle*, 114  
 iconic sign, 97, 242  
 identification fallacy, 288  
 ideograph, 70  
 idiom, 99, 101–03, 129; compound, 109  
 Idol of the Market, 193  
*ignoratio elenchi* fallacy, 299  
 illiterate usage, 128  
 image, 253  
 immediate constituent, 135  
*impasse*, 231  
 imperative mood, 173  
*in-*, *il-*, *ir-*, *im-*, 116  
*in depth* ‘thoroughly,’ 42  
 inanimate noun, 166  
 indefinite pronoun, 35–36  
 indefinite relative clause, 148  
 Indic languages, 305, 307  
 individual term, 268  
 Indo-European languages, 304–07, 329  
 Indo-Iranian languages, 307

- inductive argument, 270  
*inept*, 100  
 inference, 268; rules of, 270*n*; wrong, 295–302  
*inferiority complex*, 231  
 infinitive construction, 150–52, 172; form, 332  
 inflected form, 127–28, 155, 157  
 inflection, 305; Old English, 319–33  
 inflectional affix, 155  
 informal style, 47–49, 128  
 informative language, 234, 236, 262–63  
 Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA), 6  
 initialism, 111  
 inkhorn term, 12  
 innuendo, 282  
 instrumental case, 320  
 Insular (Irish) script, 71, 316  
 intensifying word, 229  
 intensity scale, 229  
 interdental consonant, 60  
*interest*, 117  
 International Phonetic Association, 60  
 interrogative clause, 172–73  
 interrogative language, 234, 236  
*intestine*, 202  
 intimate style, 204  
 intonation, 64–66, 159–60  
 intransitive clause, 172; verb, 166  
*introvert*, 231  
 intrusive sound, 117; *r*, 1, 93  
*-ion*, 157  
 Ionic-Attic Greek, 306  
 Iranian, 305–07  
 Irish, 86; writing, 71; *see also* Gaelic  
 irony, 253  
*irregardless*, 22, 40  
 irrelevant-authority fallacy, 289  
 Irvine, Harry, 10  
 Isaacs, Neil D., 122*n*  
*-ism*, 100  
*isthmus*, 88  
*it*, *its*, 326–27; *see also* *it's*  
 Italian, 8, 14, 73, 86, 91, 241, 304, 306, 326*n*  
 Italic languages, 306  
*it's*, 48  
*-ity*, 110  
 /j/, 60–61, 93, 314, 317  
 /j/, 60–61, 87, 89–91, 104, 119, 317  
 Jabberwocky, 161–62  
 Jakobson, Roman, 233*n*  
 James, Henry, 32  
 James I, king of Scotland, 258  
 Japanese, 7, 62, 107  
 jargon, 231, 290  
*Jax*, *Jacksonville*, 89  
*Jenny*, 74  
 Jespersen, Otto, 6–7, 10, 23, 31, 32*n*, 33*n*, 35, 313–14  
*Jiminy Crickets*, 202  
 Jinghpaw, 189–90  
 Johnson, Gerald W., 35  
 Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 1, 32, 289, 335  
 Johnson, Samuel, 19, 123, 125, 129–30  
*join*, 24  
 Jones, Carroll H., 36  
 Jones, Daniel, 66, 72, 76, 88  
 Joos, Martin, 204  
 Judeo-German, 306  
 juncture, 66  
 Jung, Carl, 231  
*junta*, 89  
 /k/, 54–55, 60, 85–86, 104, 313, 317  
*kabuki*, 62  
 Karsh, Yousuf, 48  
 Kasner, Edward, 107  
 Keats, John, 243, 252, 259  
*kempt*, 100  
 Kennedy, John F., 204, 257; and Robert, 1  
 Kentish, 309–10  
 Kenyon, John S., 47–48, 80–81  
*ketchup*, 76  
 Kilmer, Joyce, 299  
*kiln*, 92

- kind*, 110, 322–23  
*kine*, 323  
 King James Bible, *see* Authorized Version  
 Kingsley, 23, 32  
 kinship words, 189–90, 197  
 Kirk, Daniel F., 262<sub>n</sub>, 277<sub>n</sub>  
*knave*, 227  
*knight*, 227  
 Knott, Thomas A., 80  
*knotty*, *naughty*, 80  
 Kökeritz, Helge, 15<sub>n</sub>  
 Korean, 305  
 Kottler, Barnet, 44<sub>n</sub>  
 Krapp, George Philip, 339<sub>n</sub>  
 Krutch, Joseph Wood, 262  
 Kučera, Henry, 158<sub>n</sub>  
 Kurath, Hans, 80, 340
- /l/, 60–61, 92, 318, 337  
*lab*, 48  
 labial consonant, 60  
 labiodental consonant, 60  
*lady*, 225  
*LAFTA*, 112  
*La Jolla*, 89  
 Lamb, Sydney, 181, 182<sub>n</sub>  
 language, definition of, 53  
 Lappish, 305  
 larynx, 59  
 Lasswell, Thomas E., 47  
 lateral, 60–61  
 Latin, 4, 12, 14, 43, 71, 73–74, 78, 85, 93, 102, 107, 110, 118, 124–25, 155, 213<sub>n</sub>, 228, 230, 303–08, 311–12, 316–17, 319, 334–35  
*law*, 99, 314  
 law, theory, hypothesis, 272  
 Leach, E. R., 190<sub>n</sub>  
 learning languages, difficulty of, 8  
*leg*, 190, 201–02  
*legislator*, 105  
*Leicester*, 76  
 Lenneberg, Eric H., 189<sub>n</sub>  
*leprechaun*, 86  
*Lester*, 76
- Lettish, 304, 307  
 level of usage, 47, 128  
 Lewis, Sinclair, 241  
*Lewisham*, 89  
 lexical meaning, 158, 183  
 lexical rules, 176  
*liber-*, 110  
*liege*, 87  
 Light, Martin, 44<sub>n</sub>  
*like*, *as*, 41  
*limb*, 201–02  
 limerick, 258  
 limiting adjective, 157  
 Lincoln, Abraham, 243  
 Lindsay, John V., 105  
 line of poetry, 257  
*lingerie*, 76  
 linguist, 2–3, 17  
 linguistics, 2  
 linking *r*, 93  
 linking verb, 166  
 lips, 59  
*liqueur*, 77  
 liquid sound, 61  
*lisa*, 228  
 literary discourse, 238–41  
 literary style, 2  
 literature, 233–61  
 Lithuanian, 304–05, 307  
 litotes, 252  
*Littell*, 308<sub>n</sub>  
*llama*, 92  
*Llandudno*, 92  
*Llanelly*, 92  
*Llewellyn*, 92  
*Lloyd*, 92  
 loaded-question fallacy, 286  
*loan* (*vb.*), 338  
 loan-word, 12, 62, 73, 84, 102, 107, 187, 308<sub>n</sub>; *see also* borrowing; in Middle English, 334–36; in Old English, 311–16  
 locality label, 129  
*lockout*, 109  
 logic, 262–302; and language, 22  
 logical discourse, 238  
*-logue*, *-log*, 84

- London*, 312  
*look out*, 101  
 loose sentence, 255  
*lorry*, 341  
 loss of sounds, 117  
*louse, lice*, 323  
*love*, 78  
*love-in*, 109  
 Low German, 306  
 low vowel, 56–57  
 Lowth, Robert, 19, 22–25, 33–35  
*LSD*, 111  
*lust*, 229  
*luxury*, 228  
*-ly*, 99–100, 325  
  
 /m/, 60–61, 91–92, 104, 318  
 Macdonald, Dwight, 62*n*  
 MacLeish, Archibald, 239  
 macron, 316  
 Magyar, 305  
*mahogany*, 99  
 main entry in dictionary, 126  
 main stress, 67  
 major part of speech, 157, 160–62  
*make, made*, 84  
 malapropism, 120  
 Malay, 76  
*Maldon*, 244  
 Malone, Kemp, 66, 67*n*  
*-man*, 100  
*man*, 97, 99; *see also men*  
 Manchu, 305  
*mand-, mandate*, 99  
*MANIAC*, 112  
*manifold*, 108  
*manual*, 230  
 Manx, 304, 307  
*maraschino*, 86  
*marplot*, 108  
*marry*, 76  
*marry-in*, 109  
 Marryat, Frederick, 12  
 Martian, 216  
*Mary*, 76  
 mass noun, 166, 193  
  
*masseuse*, 77  
 Mathews, M. M., 12*n*, 13*n*, 340  
*mathom*, 121  
*matter* ‘pus,’ 202  
 Maugham, W. Somerset, 32  
 Maurer, David W., 204*n*, 339  
*may, can*, 50  
 McCarthy, Mary, 36  
 McDavid, Raven I., Jr., 45, 339–40  
 McKnight, G. H., 3*n*, 31*n*, 90  
*me, see I*  
 meaning, 101, 183–232; as sign content, 96–97; change of, 225–32  
*meal*, 191  
*medal, metal*, 116  
*medi(a)eval*, 74  
*mediator*, 105  
*medication*, 42  
 Melbourne, Lord, 41  
*meld*, 111  
*men*, 323  
 Mencken, H. L., 39, 254, 339–41  
 mentalism and meaning, 184–85  
*mentally ill*, 42  
*Menzies*, 93  
 Mercian, 309–10, 316  
 Meredith, George, 23  
*message* ‘sales talk,’ 42  
*metal, medal*, 116  
 metanalysis, 113–14  
 metaphor, 226, 251–53  
 metaphysical proposition, 265  
 metathesis, 118  
 meter, 246–49  
*Methodist*, 101  
 metonymy, 252  
*mezzo*, 84  
*mho*, 114  
*Miami*, 82  
*mid*, 117*n*  
 mid vowel, 56–57  
 Middle English, 4, 56, 71, 78, 86, 92, 321–22, 324–26, 330, 333–36  
 middle term, 268, 298  
*middlescent*, 111  
*mike*, 113  
*mile*, 311



- milktoast*, 101  
 Miller, Caroline, 186*n*  
*Miln(e)*, 92  
 Milton, John, 25, 29, 259  
 minced form, 202  
*mine*, 326; *see also* *I*, *me*  
 minimal pair, 59  
 minor part of speech, 157  
*minster*, 312  
**MISHAP**, 112  
*Missouri*, 82  
 misusing-authorities fallacy, 289–91  
 Mitford, Jessica, 207  
 Mitford, Nancy, 30*n*, 39, 44  
 mixed metaphor, 253  
*mob*, 113, 230  
 modal, 157  
 mode of expression, 205  
 mode of discourse, 237  
*moisturize*, 27  
 Monboddio, James Burnet, Lord, 20  
 Mongolian, 305  
*monk*, 78, 312  
 monometer, 257  
*moo*, 107  
*morning*, *mourning*, 80  
 morpheme, 53, 98–101, 103  
 Morris, Charles W., 233*n*  
*mourning*, *morning*, 80  
*mouse*, *mice*, 323  
*Mozart*, 85  
*Mrs.*, 42  
*murder*, “molder,” 77  
 Murray, Lindley, 34–35  
*muskrat*, 227  
 mutation, 304, 323  
*my*, 326; *see also* *I*, *me*  
*mystique*, 8
- /n/, 10, 60–61, 91–92, 318  
 /ŋ/, 10, 60–61, 91–92, 318  
 naive realism and meaning, 184  
 name-calling fallacy, 283, 287  
*naphtha*, 116  
 nasal cavity, 59  
 nasal sound, 60–61
- Nash, Thomas, 77, 335  
*nation*, *national*, 104  
 natural sign, 97  
*naughty*, *knotty*, 80  
 Navaho, 189  
 negative adverb, 167  
 negative proposition, 269  
*Negro*, 75, 228  
 neologism, 26–29, 42  
*nephew*, 86  
 -ness, 110  
 network, language as a, 181  
*New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, *see* *Oxford English Dictionary*  
*newt*, 114  
 Nicholson, Margaret, 37  
*nickelodeon*, 121–22  
*nickname*, 66, 114  
*nightingale*, 121  
*nobody* . . . *they*, 36  
 node in a tree diagram, 134  
 nominative case, 320  
 non-sequitur fallacy, 295–97  
 non-U usage, 39–46  
 nonce word, 111  
*none are*, 50  
 nonfinite clause, 256*n*  
 nonhuman noun, 166  
 nonrestrictive element, 66; relative clause, 160  
*nonsense*, 266, 294  
 nonstandard usage, 40, 47, 128  
 Norman Conquest, 71, 311–12, 314–15, 334  
 normative discourse, 237  
 North Germanic, 306–07  
 Northumbrian, 309–10  
 Norwegian, 306–07  
*Norwich*, 4  
*not*, 139  
 noun, 157–58, 166; plural, 73–74, 322–24, 334  
 nuance, 219, 249  
*nuclear*, 105  
*nuke*, 113  
*nun*, 78, 312

- /o/, 57, 79–80, 316, 336
- /ɔ/, 57, 79–81, 336
- /ɔɪ/, 56, 82
- obliged*, 24
- obscenity, 201
- obsolete word, 121–22, 129
- octave, 259
- of*, 86, 105
- often*, 3, 119
- O. Henry (William Sydney Porter), 254
- ohm*, 114
- Ohm, Georg, 114
- O.K.*, 48, 111, 230
- Old English, 56, 60, 71, 78, 84, 89–90, 94, 108, 114, 129, 244, 252, 308–34; writing, 70–71
- Old French, 4, 62*n*, 78, 86–87, 89, 118, 317, 334
- Old Low Franconian, 306
- Old Norse, 313
- Old Prussian, 304, 307
- Old Saxon, 306
- ology*, 100
- only*, “misplaced,” 40
- onomatopoeia, 98, 107–08, 242
- open transition, 66
- operational definition, 210
- opposition of sense, 223
- or*, 105
- or, are*, 80; *see also ore, or*
- oral cavity, 59
- orc*, 121
- ore, or*, 79–80
- origin of language, 52–53
- Orwell, George, 194–95, 266
- Oscean, 306
- Osgood, Charles E., 199*n*
- ostensive definition, 210
- ottava rima, 258
- Otto, auto*, 80
- output*, 109
- overcome*, 101
- overcorrect pronunciation, *see* hypercorrectness
- ox, oxen*, 322
- Oxford English Dictionary*, 3*n*, 125
- oxymoron, 253
- /p/, 54–55, 60, 84, 104, 117, 317
- Packard, Vance, 41, 46
- palatal consonant, 60
- Pall Mall*, 76
- palmer*, 121
- Palmer, F. R., 208*n*
- pantaloons*, 41
- pants*, 41
- paradigm, 157
- paradox, 252, 286
- paragraph, 257
- parallelism, 256
- Pardon me!* 40
- paronomasia, 251
- part-and-whole fallacy, 298
- part of speech, 156, 165–69, 202; major and minor, 157
- particle, *see* verb
- particular term, 268
- Partridge, Eric, 13, 14*n*, 16
- pass away*, 42
- passive voice, 169–72, 255
- pause, 65–66, 246–47
- pea*, 114
- pejoration, 227–28
- pellmell*, 76
- pentameter, 257
- per-*, 118
- performatory language, 235–36
- periodic sentence, 255
- permuting transformation, 140
- Perrin, Porter G., 37
- Persian, 305, 307
- personal ending of the verb, 332
- personal pronoun, 326–28
- personification, 252
- personnel*, 27
- perspiration odor*, 42
- perspire*, 42, 202
- persuasive definition, 294
- petitio principii* fallacy, 283
- petrol*, 341
- pharynx, 59
- phatic language, 236–37

- phone* 'telephone,' 113, 231  
 phone 'sound,' 5, 54  
 phoneme, 53–54  
 phonestheme, 242, 250  
 phonetic features, 198  
 "phonetic" languages, 4–5  
 phonetics and phonemics, 54–55  
 phonological component, 176, 181  
 phonotactics, 61–63, 318  
*photo*, 113  
*phthalein*, 88  
*phthisis*, 62  
 Pickering, John, 13  
*pickpocket*, 108  
 Pickwickian sense, 294  
 Pictish, 307  
 pictograph, 70  
*pierce*, 77  
*pig*, 191  
*pig in a poke*, 101  
*pigeon*, 200  
*piggin*, 186, 211  
 Pike, Kenneth, 175*n*, 181, 182*n*  
*pince-nez*, 76  
*ping-pong*, 230  
 pitch level, 64–65  
 pitch terminal, 65–66, 247  
 Pitman, Sir James, 6  
 plain-folks fallacy, 288  
 Plato, 194, 301  
 Plattdeutsch, 306  
*playing card*, 110  
*plaza*, 119  
*plop*, 97–98  
 plosive sound, 60  
*plumb*, 114  
*plumber*, 114  
 plural of nouns, *see* noun, plural  
 poetry, 257–60  
 poisoning-the-well fallacy, 287  
 Polish, 107, 304, 307  
 polyglot, 3  
 Polynesian, 10, 107, 187  
 polysemy, 220–22, 250, 292  
*poor*, 79  
 Pope, Alexander, 24, 33, 245, 337  
*popsicle*, 114  
*pork*, 191  
 Porphyry, 212  
 Porter, Katherine Anne, 13*n*  
 Portuguese, 228, 304, 306  
*posh*, 112, 230  
 possessive case, 320  
*post hoc* fallacy, 282  
*postman*, 100  
 potency factor, 199*n*; scale, 229  
*potlatch*, 187  
 Pound, Ezra, 239, 250  
*powder room*, 42  
 Prakrit, 307  
*pre-*, 118  
 predicate adjective, 165  
 prefix, 99, 127, 155  
 prejudice about language, 1  
*premise, premises*, 74  
 premise of argument, 268  
 preposition, 157; terminal, 40  
 prescriptivism, 29–38, 72, 124, 209–10  
*presently*, 27  
*prestige*, 119  
 Priestley, Joseph, 25  
 primary stress, 67  
 Primitive Germanic, 304  
 principal parts, 330  
 Pritchett, V. S., 7  
 private association, 198  
*prize*, 228  
*pro-*, 118  
*process, processes*, 43, 74  
 profanity, 201  
 progressive tense, 329  
 pronoun, 157; *see also* demonstrative,  
     personal, relative pronoun  
 pronunciation, 52–95; and spelling,  
     3–6; as sign expression, 97; change,  
     115–20; dictionary, 127; Middle  
     English, 336–37; Old English,  
     316–18; variants, 103–06  
 propaganda, 235, 265, 276  
 proper noun, 166  
 proposition, 263  
 prosodic features, 64–69  
 Proto-Germanic, 14, 304  
 proximate cause, 281

- pseudo*, 89  
 pseudo proposition, 265  
*psyche*, 89  
*psychiatry*, 62  
*pterodactyl*, 62  
 public association, 198  
*pull a boner*, 48  
 pun, 220, 251  
 purism, 12, 29  
 “purity” of language, 12–15  
*purr*, 107  
*put down*, 101  
*putout*, 109  
*PX*, 111  
 Pyles, Thomas, 16*n*, 25*n*, 31*n*, 32*n*, 70*n*, 100*n*
- quack*, 113  
*quaint*, 187  
 quatrain, 258  
 Quechua, 92  
*QUEST*, 112  
 question, 65; intonation, 159  
*Quixote*, *quixotic*, 89  
 quoting-out-of-context fallacy, 286
- /r/, 1, 54, 58, 60–61, 76–80, 92–93, 118, 318  
*radar*, 112  
*rajah*, 87, 119  
 Raleigh, Sir Walter, 30  
 rank scale, 182  
 rare usage, 129  
*re-*, 102  
 reality and language, 188–91  
*reason is because*, 45  
 reconstructed form, 303–04  
 red-herring fallacy, 299  
 redundancy in grammar, 161  
 reference, semantic, 196  
 regional variation in pronunciation, 105  
 register, 203–04  
 regular stress, 67  
 reification fallacy, 294  
 related forms, 129  
 relative clause, 145–48  
 relative pronoun, 146, 148, 328  
*restaurant*, 92  
 restrictive relative clause, 160  
*resurrect*, 114  
*retch*, 73  
 retroflex sound, 54  
 rhotacized vowel, 77  
 rhyme, *see* rime  
 rhythm, 246–49  
 Richards, I. A., 233*n*  
 rime, 244  
 rime royal, 258  
 ritual discourse, 237–38  
 “r-less” and “r-full” speech, 15, 45, 77, 82–83, 93  
 Roberts, John M., 189*n*  
*robin*, 338  
 Roget, Peter, 212  
*rolling stone gathers no moss*, 101  
 Roman alphabet, 70–71  
 Romance languages, 304  
 Romany, 227, 307; *see also* Gypsy  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 1, 77, 255*n*, 288  
 Roosevelt, Theodore, 291  
 root-creation, 107  
 Ross, A. S. C., 30, 39, 44  
*rouge*, 119  
 rounded vowel, 56  
 Rumanian, 304, 306  
 runes, 70–71  
 run-on line, 247  
 Ruskin, John, 35  
 Russian, 8, 30, 107, 190, 304, 307  
*Ruthven*, 75
- /s/, 58–61, 88–89, 103–04, 314, 317–19  
 /š/, 60–62, 89, 104, 314, 317  
 -s, 87, 99, 103–04; *see also* noun, plural  
 -’s, *see* genitive case  
 Salinger, J. D., 261  
*saliva*, 202

- sanctimonious*, 228  
*sandwich*, 104, 114  
*San José*, 89  
 Sanskrit, 303, 305, 307  
 Santayana, George, 254  
*sapfu*, 112  
*Sarah*, 76  
*Satem* languages, 307  
*saw* (*n.*), 227  
*scale, escalate*, 118  
 scale of association, 199  
 scales of grammar, 182  
*scalp* (*vb.*), 339  
 Scandinavian languages, 14, 307, 327  
 Scandinavian invasion, 311–12  
*scapegrace*, 108  
*scarecrow*, 108  
*schedule*, 86, 105  
*schizophrenia*, 85  
*Schlitz*, 62  
*Schnauzer*, 62  
*schwa*, 57*n*, 62  
 scope of use, 196, 202–05, 249;  
     change of, 230–31  
*Scotch Tape*, 230  
 Scots Gaelic, 306  
 Scott, Sir Walter, 32  
 Sebeok, Thomas A., 233*n*  
 secondary stress, 67  
*see* (*I seen*), 40, 43; *see also have saw*,  
     *he seen*  
 segmental phoneme, 64  
 self-contradiction, 263; fallacy, 286  
 semantic change, 225–32  
 semantic component, 176, 180  
 semantic feature, 197–98, 211, 223  
 Semitic writing, 70–71  
 semivowel, 60–61  
*senior citizen*, 42  
 sense, 196–98, 249; change of, 225–27  
*sense, cents*, 117  
 sentence adverb, 160, 167  
 sequence of morphemes, 154–55  
*sequence, sequences*, 74  
 Serbo-Croatian, 304, 307  
 Serjeantson, Mary, S., 311–12  
 sestet, 259  
 sets and meaning, 185–86  
*seven*, 305  
 sexual dialect, 203  
*sgraffito*, 62  
 Shakespeare, 23, 29, 31–33, 77, 85,  
     92, 198–99, 218, 243, 251, 253–54,  
     259, 314, 326–28, 333  
*shall, will*, 50  
*shanghai*, 230  
 Shaw, George Bernard, 5, 13, 23,  
     201, 254  
*she, her*, 90, 117  
*sheep* (*pl.*), 322  
 Shelley, P. B., 23, 31–32, 195, 253–  
     54, 258–59  
*shepherd*, 108  
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, 120  
 Sheridan, Thomas, 125  
 shifting-the-burden fallacy, 282  
*shire*, 121  
*shirt*, 314  
*showbiz*, 113  
*shrimp*, 105  
*shutout*, 109  
 sibilant sound, 103  
*sicle*, 114  
*sidle*, 114  
*siege*, 119  
 sign, 96–99, 101, 103  
 silent *e*, 117  
*silhouette*, 230  
 simile, 252  
*sing* (*we sung*), 28  
*sirloin*, 17*n*, 118*n*  
*sister*, 313  
*sit-in*, 109  
 Sitwell, Dame Edith, 32  
 Skinner, B. F., 99  
*skirt*, 314  
*skunk*, 338  
 slang, 47–49, 128  
 Slavic languages, 88, 304, 307  
 Sledd, James, 29*n*, 48*n*, 66, 126  
 Slessor, Sir John, 31*n*  
 slip of the tongue, 111  
*sloth*, 226  
 Slovenian, 304, 307

- slurp*, 107  
 Smith, Henry Lee, Jr., 61  
 Smollett, Tobias, 20, 25  
*snafu*, 112  
*snow job*, 110  
*so* 'very,' 42  
 social dialect, level, 47, 203; *see also*  
   status-designators, U and non-U  
   usage  
*socks, sox*, 89  
 soft palate, 60  
*son*, 78  
 sonant, 54  
*sonar*, 112  
 sonnet, 259  
*sooth*, 121  
*soprano*, 119  
 sorites, 275  
 soul of a language, 6–8  
 sound, *see* pronunciation  
 sound patterns in literature, 241–45  
*sox, socks*, 89  
*spaceship*, 116  
 Spanish, 4, 11, 14, 73, 89, 92–94,  
   119, 228, 304, 306, 326*n*, 339*n*  
*special, especial*, 118  
 specialization, 226  
 species, 211  
 speech and writing, 205; *see also* pro-  
   nunciation and spelling  
*spell out* 'explain,' 42  
 spelling, 56, 72–95; of compounds,  
   109–10; in dictionaries, 126–27;  
   pronunciation, 3–4, 6, 75–76, 79,  
   81, 85–86, 88, 92–93, 105, 119; re-  
   form, 3, 5–6; *see also* pronunciation  
   and spelling  
 Spender, Stephen, 32*n*  
 Spenser, Edmund, 259, 335  
 Spenserian stanza, 259  
*sphere*, 62  
*sphinx*, 62  
 spirant, 60  
*spirit, esprit*, 118  
 split infinitive, 40  
 spondaic meter, 248  
*sponsor, espouse*, 118  
 Spooner, W. A., 118  
 spoonerism, 118  
*SPQR*, 111  
 Sprat, Thomas, 14  
*sputnik*, 107  
*stabile, establish*, 118  
*stakeout*, 109  
 Stallworthy, Jon, 250*n*  
 Standard English usage, 35, 43, 47,  
   128; and nonstandard pronuncia-  
   tion, 119–20  
 stanza, 257  
*status, estate*, 118  
 status-designators in language, 21–26  
 Stein, Gertrude, 217, 279  
 stereotype fallacy, 278–79  
 Sterne, Laurence, 261  
 Stevenson, Robert Louis, 31  
 stipulative definition, 208, 294  
*stirrup*, 108  
*stitch in time saves nine*, 101  
 Stockwell, Robert P., 11*n*  
*stomach*, 202  
 stop sound, 60  
*STP*, 111  
*strand*, 121  
 strata in language, 181  
 stratificational theory, 181  
 straw-man fallacy, 299  
*street*, 107, 311  
*strength*, 117  
 stress, 67–68, 246–47; Germanic and  
   Indo-European, 308; Old English,  
   318  
 stroke letter, 78  
 strong declension, 325  
 strong verb, 329  
 strongest stress, 67  
 structural meaning, 183  
 structural signal, 153–65  
 structural word, 157–59  
 structure, grammatical, 169–75, 182  
 style of usage, 47–49, 204–05; labels,  
   128; variations in pronunciation,  
   104–05  
 subject-predicate structure, 194  
 subject replacement, 170–72



- subjunctive mood, 329
- subordinate clause, 152
- subordinating conjunction (subordinator), 148, 152
- subordination in literature, 255–56
- substandard usage, 40, 43, 47, 128
- substituting transformation, 140
- subterfuge*, 119
- Suci, George J., 199*n*
- suffix, 99, 127, 155
- suggest*, 90
- Sumerian writing, 70, 303
- summitry*, 110
- supplementary matter in a dictionary, 129
- suprasegmental phoneme, 64
- sure*, 80
- surface structure, 138–43, 176, 180–81
- surgery*, 42
- svarabhakti vowel, 118*n*
- svelte*, 62
- Swedish, 306–07
- Swift, Jonathan, 19, 24–25, 92, 249, 253, 337
- swim fin*, 109
- swim-in*, 109
- swimsuit*, 108
- swine* (*pl.*), 323
- swing*, *swang*, 8
- syllabary, 70
- syllabication, 127
- syllable, 56
- sylogism, 268
- symbol, literary, 253
- symbolic meaning, 242
- syncope, 117*n*
- synecdoche, 252
- synesthesia, 243
- synonym, 129, 218–19, 221; definition by, 211
- syntactic component, 176
- synthetic proposition, 264
- system as a grammatical category, 182
- systemic grammar, 182
- /t/, 3, 54–55, 60, 84–85, 88, 104, 117, 317
- /θ/, 4, 60–61, 85–86, 88, 104, 317–19
- /ð/, *see under d*
- tabloid-thinking fallacy, 279
- taboo, 201–02
- taboo*, 187
- tadpole*, 108
- tagmeme, 181–82
- tagmemic theory, 181
- tain*, 102
- Taj Mahal*, 87
- take*, 314
- take a walk*, 101
- Tannenbaum, Percy H., 199*n*
- tarfu*, 112
- task*, *tax*, 118
- tautology, 263, 297
- teach-in*, 109
- teeth, 59
- Tellurian, 217
- Tennyson, Alfred, 242, 248, 251, 257
- tense of verb, 308
- tertiary stress, 67*n*
- terza rima, 258
- tester* ‘canopy,’ 73
- testimonial fallacy, 290
- tetrameter, 257
- th*, 104, 226
- Thames*, 85
- that*, 324, 328
- that*-clause, 148–50, 172
- the*, 324; (*adverbial*), 321
- theory, 272; of language, 175–82
- thesaurus, 123, 212
- they*, *their*, *them*, 314, 327
- thimble*, 117
- think-tank*, 108, 230
- thinking and language, 192–95
- third*, *thirty*, 118
- this*, 324
- thorn (*þ*), 71, 86, 316, 318*n*
- thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *thine*, 326–27
- three*, 118
- threepence*, 75
- thunder*, 117

- Thurber, James, 254  
*thyme*, 4, 85  
*tide*, 226  
*tiger*, 226  
 time in English and Hopi, 193  
 Tindale, William, 32  
*tine*, 117  
*tinkle*, 107  
 Tinkler, John, 122*n*  
*tnesis*, 62  
*to* (*infinitive marker*), 159  
 Tocharian, 305, 307  
 Tolkien, J. R. R., 121  
*tomahawk*, 338  
 tongue, 59  
*tonic*, 203  
*Tony*, 85  
*too* 'very,' 42  
*tooth, teeth*, 304  
 topic sentence, 257  
*tor*, 312  
*tossplot*, 108  
*town*, 116  
 trachea, 59  
*-tract*, 102  
 trade name, 230  
 Trager, George L., 61  
 transfer of sense, 226, 252  
 transformational grammar, 176  
 transformation, 140; rules, 176, 180  
 transition, 66  
 transitive clause, 172; verb, 166, 170  
 translation, 187  
 tree diagram, 134  
 Tree of Porphyry, 212–13  
*travail, travel*, 105  
*tri-kini*, 227  
 trimeter, 257  
 triplet, 258  
 trochaic meter, 247–48  
*trousers*, 41  
*truck*, 341  
 truth and falsehood in propositions,  
     263–65, 269–71  
*tsetse*, 62  
*tulle*, 79  
 Turkish, 8, 305  
*TVA*, 111  
*twit*, 229  
*twitter*, 107  
*typewrite*, 114  
  
 /u/, 57, 71, 77–79, 316, 336  
 /ʊ/, 56–57, 79, 337  
 /ʌ/, 57, 78, 337  
 /ju/, 79  
 U and non-U usage, 39–46, 128  
*UFO*, 112  
*ufologist*, 112  
*UJOIN*, 112  
 ulterior cause, 281  
 ultimate constituent, 135  
 Umbrian, 306  
 umlaut, 304  
*un-*, 99–100  
 uncountable noun, 166  
*understand*, 101  
 undistributed-middle fallacy, 297  
*UNESCO*, 112  
*unit*, 114  
 unit, grammatical, 144, 182  
 unit noun, 166, 193  
 universal term, 268  
*unkempt*, 100  
*unlawfully*, 99  
*unscathed*, 121  
*unusuality*, 110  
*upright*, 101  
*usage*, 59*n*  
 usage, 21–51, 105; labels in diction-  
     ary, 128  
 uvula, 59  
  
 /v/, 60–61, 86, 317–19  
 /ʌ/, *see under u*  
 vague-authority fallacy, 290  
 vague reference, 221–22, 293  
 validity of inference, 269–71  
 variant pronunciations in a diction-  
     ary, 127

variation in language, *see* scope of use

*vary, very*, 57

*vault*, 92

*vehicle*, 117

velar consonant, 60

velum, 59–60

Venusian, 216–17

verb, 157–58, 166, 329–33; and particle, 101, 109, 136–38

verse form, 257–60

*very, vary*, 57

*vest*, 122

*via*, 73

*viable*, 8

vicious-circle fallacy, 283

Vietnamese, 305

**VISTA**, 112

vocabulary, 8, 96–132; *see also* diction

vocal cords, 54, 59, 61

voice, 54, 58–59, 104

Vortigern, 310

vowel, 54, 56–58; gradation, 329*n*;  
length, 56; quantity in Old English, 316–17; spellings, 73–83

**VP**, 111

vulgarity, 201

/w/, 60–61, 90, 92–94, 318

**WAC**, 112

*wade-in*, 109

**WAGGS**, 112

**WAIF**, 112

*waistcoat*, 122

Walker, John, 91, 125

*wall*, 311

Wallace, George, 288

Waller, Edmund, 241

**Waltham**, 88

Walton, Isaac, 32

*wanhope*, 121–22

*warmth*, 117

Watt, William W., 37

Waugh, Evelyn, 207

**WAVES**, 112

*way of life*, 42

weak declension, 325

weak stress and sound loss, 117

weak verb, 308, 330, 332

weakest stress, 67

Webster, Daniel, 125

Webster, Noah, 12, 15, 22, 34–35, 125

*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 28–29, 40, 47–48, 62*n*, 126

*wed-in*, 109

Wells, H. G., 254

Welsh, 92, 304, 307

Weisted, Leonard, 15

*Weltschmerz*, 187

*wend*, 121

West Germanic, 305–06

West Saxon, 309–10, 316

*wh*-question, 173

*wh*-word, 94

Wheelwright, Philip E., 233*n*

*which*, 105, 328

*whippoorwill*, 107

*white meat*, 201

Whitman, Walt, 260

*whiz*, 107

*who, whom*, 32–33, 328

*whoosh*, 97

Whorf, Benjamin Lee, 193; hypothesis, 194, 213–14

*why*, 320–21

*wide, width*, 104

*wife, wives*, 104

Wijk, Axel, 6

Wilkins, John, 212

*will, shall*, 50

William the Conqueror, 315

Wilson, Edmund, 7, 13*n*

*wine*, 311

wishful-thinking fallacy, 286

*with*, 105

Witherspoon, John, 13

*woman, women*, 323

Woollcott, Alexander, 240

word, and morpheme, 98–99; and thing, 188–91; as a sign, 96–97; classes, 165–69; division, 127;

- order, 154–55; written versus grammatical, 109
- word acronym, 112
- worsted*, 79
- write, was writ*, 28
- writing, 3, 52–53, 303; history of, 70–71; Old English, 316; origin of, 53; *see also* pronunciation and spelling
- written form in a dictionary, 126–27
- written word, 109
- Wyld, H. C., 15*n*, 24
- wynn (*p*), 71, 316
- /x/, 11, 72, 317; *see also* /h/
- /y/, 316
- ye* ‘the,’ 86
- Yeats, W. B., 249–50, 252
- yes-no* question, 173
- Yiddish, 306
- you*, indefinite, 48
- you was*, 8, 21–22, 24–25, 28, 43
- /z/, 58–61, 87, 103–04, 317
- /ž/, 60–61, 87, 104, 119
- Zachrisson, R. E., 6
- Zimbardo, Rose A., 122*n*
- zipper*, 230
- zoot suit*, 121–22
- Zuñi, 189, 213











PB-35316  
5-11



# DATE DUE SLIP

RETURN MAY 20 '83

DUE EDUC APR 28 '84

DUE EDUC FEB 11 '84

FEB 11 RETURN

EDUC APR 2 '87

DUE EDUC MAY 5 '87

APR 23 RETURN

DUE EDUC DEC 27 '88

DEC 16 RETURN

DUE EDUC NOV 12 '95

RETURN NOV 25 '95

RETURN NOV 2 '99

Re

PE 1072 P99 1970 C-2  
PYLES THOMAS 1905-  
ENGLISH AN INTRODUCTION TO  
LANGUAGE  
39782126 EDUC



\*000016316903\*

PE

PE 1072 P99 1970 C. 2  
Pyles, Thomas, 1905-  
English: an introduction to  
language  
39782126 EDUC



2127073

EDUCATION LIBRARY



HARCOURT, BRACE & WORLD, INC.